

# Meetings

*by Mint Stick*

How did Crookshanks first come to meet Severus Snape? Mostly gen, ends up as SSHG.

## Meetings

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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### Part I

The castle, with all of its towers and turrets and hallways and staircases and dungeons, was the largest thing Crookshanks had ever seen.

In fact, after having spent most of his life in the Diagon Alley pet store, he'd thought that the small town house where his new young human had taken him first was huge there were all those wonderful rooms to explore, and the small spot of lawn where he was occasionally allowed was like magic.

But compared to this new place Hogwarts, his human had called it his previous new home seemed downright shabby. Not that he was going to tell his human that. She was kind to him, and Crookshanks knew enough about people to realise how rare that was.

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Humans.

Humans everywhere.

Small humans. Running. Shouting. Yelling. Screaming.

Crookshanks winced. The noise was hurting his delicate ears. And those smaller humans were very, very good at making noise. And at running around not looking where they were going. One had nearly trampled on his tail; Crookshanks gave it a quick lick, making sure his pride and joy was still there and whole. Another had tried to catch him, yelling something about 'having fun with the ugly orange beast', but he'd managed to escape.

He wandered downwards, letting his whiskers lead the way.

It was quiet here, in the lowest levels of the castle. Barely anyone moving around, especially when the smaller humans were herded into the rooms breaking off from the main corridor and locked away safely.

Something someone was moving in one of the dark corners.

Crookshanks sniffed the air. Warm. Living. Food-like, his nose told him.

He crouched, pulling his ears closer to his head, concentrated, and pounced.

Still warm. Food. Well, sort of. There was meat and blood and guts, but the pieces of thick tough skin kept getting stuck in his throat and he had to keep spitting them out.

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'Well, hello there.'

The human towering over him didn't sound threatening. Crookshanks eyed him curiously. He wasn't going to take away his prey, was he? He didn't think humans liked that sort of thing, but one never knew. They kept doing things Crookshanks didn't expect of them.

'Is that a rat you've caught there?'

Crookshanks let out a low growl, hoping it would serve both as a response and a warning. Inedible skin or not, the rat so that's what the critter was called! was his, and his alone.

The human crouched down next to him, holding out his hand. Crookshanks sniffed it carefully. The man seemed safe enough, so ... well, if the human wanted to pet him, he wouldn't mind.

'You're new here, aren't you?' the human murmured, reaching out to scratch behind his ear. 'I haven't seen you down here before. Don't let Mrs Norris catch you. She thinks this is her territory.'

Crookshanks didn't know who Mrs Norris was but that piece of information seemed worth remembering.

'You look part Kneazle.' The man Crookshanks knew this was what male humans were called was eyeing him more carefully now. 'You understand what I'm saying, don't you?'

'Mrrr.' His response earned him a small smile.

'How about a deal?' the man asked. 'The way you've mauled the rat, well, I assume it's not to your taste. I have something that you might prefer. Come with me.'

Crookshanks wasn't sure what to do with his prey. Fortunately, he didn't have to wonder long. The man picked up the remains and wrapped them in a piece of cloth he pulled out from his pocket. 'I need certain rat parts,' he explained. 'They're an ingredient in several potions. Potions are ... never mind, you probably don't care about that.'

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They walked in companionable silence for a while, the man striding ahead and Crookshanks following closely behind, until the man stopped by something that looked like a blank piece of wall to Crookshanks. He'd learned enough to know that in this castle, not everything was the way it seemed, though, so he pawed the wall cautiously.

'Not that easy, I'm afraid.' The man took out the long narrow stick all humans always carried and made a complicated motion in the air.

A door opened in the wall so suddenly that it made the hair on Crookshanks's back stand up. Hoping that the man didn't notice Crookshanks was no coward! he walked in, holding his head high. The man could be trusted; his Kneazle-senses were more than certain about that by now. He only hoped there were no nasty surprises waiting inside.

'Here.'

The man was holding out a bowl with something in it something that smelled delicious.

'Chicken entrails,' he explained. 'House elves keep bringing me everything they have left over from cooking, but I only need a small part of it. And there is only so much that I can pickle and put in the jars to scare the little imbeciles!'

He put the bowl down, letting Crookshanks sniff at it.

*Now this is more like it!* he thought, taking the first bite. Not that he minded the food his own human gave him; it was filling enough. But it lacked the taste and smell ~~of~~ food.

When he'd finished, the man picked the bowl up with a smirk. 'Now, I believe I mentioned a deal. How about this: you bring me any rats you've caught, and get a bowl of this, or something equally tasty, in return?'

Crookshanks pretended to think it over for a moment. It wouldn't do to look too enthusiastic. On the other hand, humans tended to lose patience far too quickly...

He looked up at the man. 'Miaow.' There. That was clear enough.

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It didn't take Crookshanks long to discover the most rat-infested areas in the dungeons. The deal was certainly working out well, except that on occasions, he had to exercise restraint to only catch the rats one at a time.

Once, he got into an argument with Mrs Norris, whose acquaintance he'd made the very next day after meeting the man in black, over a particularly juicy rat, but that was solved amicably. (*Too* amicably, according to Mrs Norris's own human, who tried to hit Crookshanks with a broomstick when he found them. Crookshanks still winced when remembering the incident.) Sometimes they hunted together, but Crookshanks found he preferred prowling the dungeons on his own. Mrs Norris had her own human who gave her treats, after all; the kind man Crookshanks had found was someone he wanted to keep to himself.

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'Get away from Scabbers, you horrid beast!'

Crookshanks hissed at the boy and backed off. He knew to stay away from the students' pet rats after it turned out that a screechy-voiced girl with a yellow tie had made a huge fuss over her Annie going missing, the kind man had given Crookshanks a very serious look, raised eyebrow and all, and warned him to stick to dungeon rats but *this* one was different. It reeked of evil. Crookshanks didn't know just what it was, but something was very, very wrong with that rat.

He really wanted to exchange it for another bowl of steaming fresh chicken liver.

Unfortunately, the redhead kept getting in the way. And the boy was a friend of his own human, so Crookshanks had to be circumspect in his attempts to get at the rat.

He wished his human had picked her friends with more care. The other one, the boy with black hair and pieces of glass in his face, he was all right. But the redhead made Crookshanks uncomfortable sometimes, and not just when his face was redder than his hair from all the yelling.

Crookshanks didn't think humans should have hair that colour. It made him feel less special.

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'Oh, Crooks, why does Snape have to be so *awful*?' His human buried her face wet, ugh in his fur, sobbing loudly. 'He called me insufferable. And a know-it-all, but I suppose that's not so bad. But insufferable! He hates me, I know he does. Is it because I'm friends with Harry? Or because I'm a Gryffindor? Or a girl? Well, he hates everyone, boys too. He only likes his Slytherins. I bet he disembowels fluffy kittens for fun, too. Oh, Crooks... you're so lucky that you don't have to deal with him.'

*Snape*. The name sounded familiar. Wasn't that what Mrs Norris's human had called the kind man just the other day? Crookshanks was almost certain of that.

He sighed. Humans. They never could tell the good sort apart from the bad ones.

## Part II

'I swear, if you don't keep that beast of yours caged, I'm going to kick him out myself!'

The redhead was yelling again. This was getting tiresome. Head held high, Crookshanks gave the young male a parting look of loathing and strode out.

It wasn't his fault that the boy had apparently hung something looking like an uncooked sausage between his legs, right after shedding the layers of skin that had covered him before. And that it had turned out to be attached to him. Crookshanks had certainly seen humans without that outer skin clothes, they called it before; his own human was never shy about letting him watch when she changed for a new day or let the stream of water beat her body. And she had nothing of the sort down there.

Pffft. They could have their mating ritual without him. He knew when he wasn't wanted.

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'Look, luv, I'm serious about this.' The boy's voice was pleading. 'We have to get married. Mum has let this slide so far, but it's been three months since the battle now and I'm getting bloody tired of those *looks* she keeps giving me. I know she doesn't approve of us living together like this, it's just not the way it's done here.'

'Here, as in the Wizarding World? As opposed to the way Muggles do it?'

Crookshanks could recognise the sneer in her voice even if the boy apparently couldn't.

'There are plenty of couples living together since the war, Ron. We're hardly the only ones.'

'Yeah, but most of them are already engaged. And some others are ... well, none of the purebloods are doing it.'

Crookshanks sneaked a bit closer, hoping to have a better view on what was going on. The silence coming from his human was telling.

'Don't look at me like that, Hermione! You know that I'm just fine with the way things are. It's just ... well, Mum is a bit old-fashioned, you know? And it would be easier all around if we just got married, you know that. I mean, it's fine living like this now, but soon you'll be getting pregnant and...'

'Oh, I will, will I? Please tell me how that is supposed to happen. I have no intention to have children yet, as I've explained once or twice.'

The boy drummed the table top with his fingers. 'Well, I expected you'd get over that, once we've been together for a bit and you've had time to realise that you want a family after all. Proper, like. Everyone has children when they're young. If we don't ... people might think there's something wrong with me! Or you.'

From the way her eyes were shooting daggers at the boy, Crookshanks decided it was safer to stay where he was.

'I think it's time we had a serious talk, Ron,' she said at last.

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'I'm going to invite someone over tonight, Crooks. Be a good boy and don't snarl at him when he gets here, please.'

Crookshanks pretended not to hear her. It was easy these days; the human she'd visited with him recently had declared his advanced age was taking a toll on him and that he was slowly going deaf. He supposed there was some truth to it; there were times when his hearing had been better. He could still tell when a new packet of food was being opened in the kitchen, though, no matter where he was, so he didn't worry too much about it.

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'You can leave your cloak here, Severus,' Crookshanks heard his human say in the hallway. 'The kitchen's over there; I thought we could have dinner in the living room, but I still need to check on something first. You're welcome to sit down and see if there's anything on the telly, or you can just come with me if you like.'

'I'll just come and help you with the dinner, if you don't mind.'

Crookshanks's ears perked up at the voice. He knew that man! It had been a few years, but he'd spent enough time in his company to recognise him anywhere.

He climbed out of his basket damn those old limbs; he missed the agility he used to have and started waddling towards the door.

'Oh, and this here is Crookshanks.'

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'You never even knew he was always prowling the dungeons?'

'I had *no* idea!' She snuggled closer to the man and petted Crookshanks, who was purring contentedly in his lap. 'I figured he was getting extra food from somewhere, as he sometimes turned his nose up at the things I gave him, but if I'd known he was hunting potions ingredients for you... you know I was going back and forth between being scared to death of you, hating your guts and wanting you to recognise my superior intelligence, yes? Well, at that time I still seriously believed you were a mean and nasty bastard, even if I didn't think you were the embodiment of evil the way Harry did. I'd have been terrified to know Crooks wandered around in the dungeons!'

'And now?' The man smirked.

Crookshanks waited patiently for the snogging to end. It was starting to get a bit uncomfortable in the lap, with his own human dangerously close to toppling onto him, but he wanted to hear her answer.

Finally they stopped, panting and grinning at each other. When she'd caught her breath, his human pulled him into her lap and gave him a kiss on the nose.

'Crooks is an excellent judge of character. He seems to approve of you, so who am I to argue?'

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When the humans got up from the sofa and headed towards the bedroom, Crookshanks made his way slowly back to his basket in the kitchen. They would probably appreciate the privacy, and he was quite determined to do everything in his power to get the man to stay.

The End

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A/N: This was written as a birthday present for ayerf, whose prompt was this: Crookshanks meeting Severus for the first time (could be the first time, in Hermione's third year, or for the first time as the man in Hermione's life, or both). Thanks go to ayerf also for looking this over for me!