

The Great Tuna Heist

by Anastadne

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: The return of Anastadne (Anastasia and Ariadne) and tag!fic. *two sweeping cloaks rustle in sardonic unison*

*Starring Crookshanks and OFC**

*(OFC = Other Feline Character)

Crookshanks lay under the table, his tail twitching in irritation.

It wasn't that he particularly disliked the Slytherin Common Room. It was dimly lit, and dimly lit was fine with him - shadows were good for lurking, after all, and lurking was among his favorite ways to pass time now that the rat was gone.

But he was a Kneazle with an agenda, and his agenda did not include being locked in the Slytherin Common Room any longer.

A nearby portrait sneezed and muttered something about "beasts."

"Yow," Crookshanks complained, and glared at the door.

"Quidditch," a voice declared and cleared its throat before continuing, "Not a soul in the castle. Not alive, anyway."

Crookshanks peered up at the piercing green eyes staring down at him from a portrait above the fireplace. A cat, slick black and wearing a fancy collar shifted in its owner's arms. It regarded Crookshanks with disdain.

"You don't belong here, familiar."

Crookshanks sniffed and narrowed his eyes as if that was perfectly plain. He wondered if his claws could tear canvas.

The cat examined its nails by the dim firelight and stated casually, "I could tell you how to get out. If you like...."

A low grumble emerged from the Kneazle's throat, and his tail lashed once. *Quidditch?* He had no idea about the pertinence of Quidditch to his present situation.

He reviewed his list of least favorite things to do, and added, "Listening to poncy gits spouting nonsense," under which heading he immediately added the subcategory, "Especially when they're dead."

The cat in the portrait stretched casually and, after kneading the supple green velvet of its companion's lap, leapt sinuously out of the frame.

Crookshanks leapt several feet sideways, and growled more loudly, crouched to run. *Spring*, he corrected himself, but his muscles said otherwise. This was not normal portrait behavior. He put a ticky mark under "Things not behaving properly" on his internal list, which knocked "Potentially tasty things I can smell but not get to" down a notch.

The black cat twined around the table leg. "I'm not dead," it said, its eyes crinkling in amusement at Crookshanks' obvious distress.

"Rrow," Crookshanks objected, glancing up at the portrait, where the frowning occupant was carefully picking cat hairs off of velvet robes, and back to this interloping apparition. He begged to differ. Live things do not shed on portrait people.

Of this, he was certain. He'd tried.

"Do you wish to leave here?" the cat said, arching its back, leaning backwards and stretching slowly.

Crookshanks eyed the cat suspiciously as it leisurely padded over a nearby table, neatly hopped up onto the surface and peered down at him.

Taking a last look around the room, Crookshanks decided that it couldn't be any worse. After eating all of the children's sweets and clawing the stuffing out of most of the pillows, he'd had enough of the place.

Once he leapt up to the table, his paws skittering over the polished surface, the cat's satisfied "I've got a secret" grin widened further.

A portrait of a jungle scene hung level with the table top, the deep wilderness beckoning.

The cat simply stepped into the portrait, expertly negotiated its way to the jungle floor, and sat.

Crookshanks stood frozen. He watched in awe as the cat demonstrated the reality of the portrait by prancing around in a wide circle, dipping its head low under giant leaves hanging heavy with fruit.

Crookshanks raised a hesitant paw, reached out, and swiped at the canvas.

When his paw met only empty air where canvas should be, he pulled back, froze, then inched closer to the frame and sniffed. It smelled humid. And green.

He sprang, joining the cat on the jungle floor, and immediately sat and began licking his paw to wash his ear, as though he'd always known this was possible, and had intended to stay locked in the dungeon for the last three days.

The cat blinked at him implacably, and waited for him to finish cleaning his ears.

Even between Slytherins and Gryffindors, some things were sacred.

Clean ears was at the top of the list.

When Crookshanks finished, the cat reached up a nearby tree and scraped long, satisfying gouges in its bark.

Crookshanks' eyes gleamed. From somewhere off to the left, he heard a small rustling in the undergrowth, and caught the unmistakable scent of...

... *tuna*.

The long fronds swung, bouncing off of the soft earth and allowing sharp beams of light through. Heat emanated through the gaps as well as a soft wind, carrying the dizzying scent.

Tuna was very high on the list. Very high, indeed.

Licking his lips, Crookshanks turned to the cat who sat patiently, its tail curled neatly around its feet. It nodded slightly, indicating that Crookshanks should go on.

Pushing his nose through the leaves, Crookshanks was immediately greeted with a grand scene. House-elves rushed back and forth, darting from stations where food lay in various states of preparation. A whole fish lay ready on the table just below the portrait, glistening in the soft torchlight.

Crookshanks couldn't help it.

His purring was nearly out of control.

A palm frond tickled his nose as his companion joined him silently.

The two felines crouched in the kitchen art, tails twitching in unison.

A low rumble started deep in Crookshanks' chest, a rumble that was echoed by his companion. Except... it sounded like the cat was....

Singing?!

Not much will distract a Kneazle from a nearby tuna, sitting whole and glistening on a nearby table, only one leap away.

The Weasley twins advancing on him was one.

Peeves was another.

He stared aghast at the cat next to him, so startled he almost forgot to add "Felines Singing" as a new subcategory under "Things not behaving according to the rules."

"... and also some for me." His pale-eyed companion had not taken its eyes from the tuna.

"Rrrrow?" Crookshanks asked, appalled. *Show tunes?*

His companion merely hummed at him, and Crookshanks turned his attention back to the tuna.

Pushing out from the portrait and settling on his haunches, Crookshanks prepared for the perfect, well-timed, and smooth spring. A twin was approaching from the left, talking loudly about being hungry and the lack of good food while the other was gnawing on something in a quite undignified manner. Crookshanks' eyes narrowed disdainfully

Suddenly, the kitchen went sideways, a blur of black passed over him, and Crookshanks was falling, his body automatically twisting to right himself in mid-air. The tuna was directly under him. He prepared to land, grab hold and run.

In mid-flight, however, Crookshanks felt his tail snagged and jerked upward as someone yelled, "Bloody cat!"

Kneazle! Crookshanks corrected as he yowled in protest.

Another blur of black and the sound of something heavy and wet hitting the floor caught his attention as the floor appeared again upside down.

Crookshanks curled upward, clawing at whatever had hold of his tail. A flurry of red freckles flew about as the shouts of outrage from dozens of house-elves joined the chaos.

"I got 'im, George!" Fred yelled triumphantly, turning to his twin.

The room spun to the left, and a grinning face filled his vision.

Bloody thieves! Crookshanks spat, glaring at George Weasley with eyes that would have made the Dark Lord himself step back.

The Weasley's grin only broadened.

Crookshanks lashed out with a lightning-fast paw, connecting the dots of George's freckled cheeks with his trademark C.

"OW!" George exploded in outrage, palm flying to his face to stop the bleeding.

Fred roared with laughter. "He got you but good!"

Diversion, Crookshanks thought desperately as the walls swayed closer, then father away, as Fred's glee shook his entire body *A diversion come on, you ruddy Slytherin freak-of-nature...*

From under a nearby countertop, he distinctly heard the words, "You're a marked man, Jack Sparrow." A blinding blur of black, a wet slapping sound as the tuna - which was fully four times as big as the cat itself - bumped along a shelf of neatly stacked kettles, sending them crashing down to bounce randomly.

House-elves scattered.

Crookshanks twisted himself downward again, splayed his claws deeply into Fred's leg, and was rewarded with the sweet sensation of freedom.

It was almost instantly replaced by the feel of his head smacking the floor.

A flash of light, and he stood, momentarily stunned.

"Catch!" he heard, and was immediately knocked sprawling by the tuna catching him full in the chest.

Landing on his back, the weight of the fish sliding around on his tummy, Crookshanks had an excellent view of an enraged Fred, a livid George, and Peeves all coming toward him. Stray house-elves fled in all directions, grabbing various food items in the hopes of saving them from harm.

His eyes narrowing, Crookshanks grabbed the fish in his mouth, its body and tail trailing along his belly, and ran. Above him, the cat was running along the table, knocking utensils, pots, and pans, running through rolled out dough, and emerging at the edge with flour all over his fur. A twin made a grab for the black cat, only to trip over a house-elf sized stool, dragging an entire hanging set of pots along with him to crash to the floor.

Your fur! Crookshanks yelled though a mouthful of flopping tuna, in response to which the now grayish cat nodded, and, incredibly, ducked into a dark corner under a table to set about cleaning himself.

Clean fur, after all, was very high on the, well... it goes without saying.

Peeves swept down beside the other freckled beast that was setting his sights on Crookshank's tail, only to grab the fish's tail instead.

The jerking motion sent Crookshanks end over end. Somehow, his grip held, even when Peeves darted high up into the air.

He was joined mid-flight, however, by a freshly clean and newly slick black cat as it sprang from the side, sinking its teeth into the most delicious part.

Incredibly, even while twisting in the air at the end of a tuna, the cat was still humming. It said, quite clearly, with a mouthful of fish, "I want to know what it tastes like."

Eyes closed, lost in the intoxicating taste of their sashimi, neither feline noticed that the meal to which they were clinging was sweeping through the kitchens, higher, ever higher, as Peeves whirled about, cackling insanely.

A horrendous crash from below caused them all, even Peeves, to pause.

Clinging to the swaying tuna, Crookshanks looked down, and immediately added "Heights" to... yes.

Sprawled below him, he saw Fred Weasley clinging desperately to his twin's booted foot.

The rest of the other Weasley appeared to have been swallowed by the wall.

"Oooo, you is blocking the laundry chute, you is! You is a bad Weasley!" A wobbly and, to all appearances, quite inebriated house-elf was tugging ineffectually at a corner of the hapless Weasley's robes.

Loud and rather violent vowel sounds echoed within the wall.

Peeves swooped down for a closer look at the mayhem, and, as he flitted through the stone, the tuna and its passengers, being somewhat more solid than the poltergeist, slipped out of his hands slithered down the wall.

Its passengers were not amused.

Not at all.

Leaping neatly from the falling fish a split-second before it smacked Fred Weasley on the head, the felines clawed their way down Fred's back, landing neatly next to the laundry chute, whence horrifying screams revealed that Peeves had found George's other end.

Eyeing the scattered house-elves, Crookshanks paused to wipe his whiskers clean with a gingery paw.

"Fancy something sweet?" his companion asked, raising the whiskers over one gleaming green eye.

"Rrrrowr," Crookshanks complained. There was something unfeline about that particular ability. The fact that he couldn't do it ranked right near the top of things he didn't want other felines to know about.

The black cat merely smirked at him, crouched, and leapt up onto a nearby counter.

"Mrrr-row?" Crookshanks inquired.

"A long, long time ago," the Slytherin sang, tail twitching as it nudged a warm brown pastry toward the edge of a painting in which a plethora of small, round creatures capered madly in an endless and astonishingly flat field. "I can still remember," the cat continued.

Dozens of tiny furry paws raised to the heavens, greeting the Slytherin cat as it edged the pie into the painting.

"Bye, bye, American pie," the Slytherin cat finished, leaping neatly into the painting.

"Rrrrruh?" Crookshanks wondered, but followed, joining his companion to watch the strange little rodents falling into ecstasy over the succulent, sweet pastry.

"Wait."

Crookshanks cocked both eyebrows at his companion, but sat and watched.

As the sun sank low on the impossibly distant and unvaryingly straight horizon, the small creatures, now covered in purple berry juice and pastry crumbs, fell into dazed, sugar-shocked slumber.

The cat's green eyes gleamed in the first light of the rising moon. "Dessert," he informed his Gryffindor companion.

Padding amongst the numerous sleeping creatures, some lying on their sides with small padded feet poised up in the air over their swollen bellies, both felines settled and ate their fill of pie.

Soon, both were completely engrossed in the most sacred of post-meal activities.

"Missed a spot," the cat commented, sweeping a careful eye over Crookshanks and picking the last of the crumbs from his paws.

Crookshanks scowled, but nodded in gratitude and eliminated the offending particle from his chest.

Once clean, the cat swept his paw to the side, bowed slightly and announced, "Down the hole with you, then."

Crookshanks peered into the hole carefully, wishing to have nothing to do with further adventures and everything to do with sleeping off the strange mixture of pastry and fish in his belly, which was so distended that it threatened to touch the ground.

While waiting for his eyes to adjust to the darkness, Crookshanks heard a tremendous crash and was rudely shoved head-first into the hole.

The passageway was stuffy and damp, and not at all a dignified passageway for a Kneazle to travel; however, left with little choice, Crookshanks scowled and continued on, growling angrily as his paws touched something wet.

Dirty laundry. Crookshanks shuddered. Why humans couldn't wash their fur in a civilized manner...?

Any light was blocked as he rounded a corner, and he heard the loud banging, yelling and not-at-all proper language fading behind him. Relying on feel, he counted his paces and came to a halt. Thin stripes of light bled around the edges of something, the stripes widening when he placed his paw against the panel.

Shoving his head against the portrait backing, Crookshanks found himself looking down at a headboard and two sleeping figures in the dim moonlight.

He curled his paws over the edge and peered down, the portrait weighing heavily on his head, as he crouched and carefully prepared to leap. Wouldn't do to wake

Suddenly, someone's cry of "Pie!" eclipsed Crookshanks' thoughts, filling the tiny space and echoing all around him. A black ball of fur rammed into him and, in a tangle of paws, tails, and something that smelled like blueberry, they both tumbled down out of the wall.

The black cat scrambled over the rolling hills of bedspread between the surprised pair of sleepy figures and down to the floor, while Crookshanks landed directly in the arms of the bushy-haired witch.

Which was very nearly at the top of his list of best places to be.

Perhaps right at the top.

He was getting sleepy. He would revise the list tomorrow and....

Severus scowled as Hermione cradled the purring Kneazle in her arms.

"Wonder where he's been?" Hermione said into Crookshanks' fur, then pulled back, her expression changing to a mix of disgust and curiosity. Peering into Crookshanks' face, she ventured, "Smells like tuna... and... pie?"

Severus turned away from the reunion, roughly pulling the sheets with him and muttering, "Bloody cat. Does nothing but sleep."