

# Crooked

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A short account of post-war healing and rapprochement. Inspired by an old English nursery rhyme.

## One

*Chapter 1 of 1*

A short account of post-war healing and rapprochement. Inspired by an old English nursery rhyme.

*There was a crooked man*

She watched him thrash against the restraints as he slept. They'd had to tie him down after the third time he tore his neck open, fighting his phantoms.

"And my soul?" he had asked.

Was it better to kill from expediency and mercy than from the sheer joy of slaughter? Dead is dead.

But, she thought, straightening a corner of the sheet, if remorse could heal a broken soul, surely its fire could temper the iron of a bent and damaged one, and make it true?

"I don't want to," he muttered again.

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*Who walked a crooked mile*

Slytherin common room. What would it take to bring back the children? The children who came to the school with hope in their hearts, and who left, driven out by the choices of their parents.

He trailed shaking fingers along the back of a sofa, remembering.

"So, Snape, what do you know that's useful to us?" he had been asked.

Was it then that his plans for a hero's life had gone awry?

The Granger girl was asleep in his old chair. The only quiet place in the castle, now. He watched her.

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*He found a crooked sixpence*

The Order of Merlin awards ceremony was a farce. Two weeks after being tried for murder, treason, and other crimes less glamorous, he was up before the Wizengamot again to take their shiny medal and their dirty money.

He gave them no smile to save their consciences. Neither, he noted, did Granger. She stood a little behind her friends, allowing them the limelight.

When the posthumous awards were given, her jaw tightened.

The firewhisky he pressed on her at the reception brought no colour to her cheeks, but her thanks felt like overpayment.

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#### *Upon a crooked stile*

Minerva took them in like the waifs and strays they were, she to apprentice in Transfiguration, he to resume his teaching.

Neither of them spoke much when the damaged corridors obliged their paths to cross. Granger had few words these days, though her eyes seemed to take in more than what was simply before them, and she jumped at sounds no others could hear.

Snape had ghosts enough of his own still, so he allowed her her silence while he held on to his own.

They walked the empty halls together, sharing their silence.

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#### *He bought a crooked cat*

Snape taught his Slytherins that there could be honour in ambition and cunning, but nothing came for free – not power, not position, not money, not even lunch. There was always a price to pay. The trick was to persuade someone to pay the price without causing them pain. Sometimes it was even worth paying the price oneself.

And so he, a man who had long wanted to practice what he now felt free to preach, paid from his own pocket for the morsels of raw beef with which he bribed Granger's ugly cat.

\*

#### *That caught a crooked mouse*

Hermione could not understand the attraction of Snape's office, but whenever Crookshanks went missing, she was sure to find him there.

She couldn't just let him roam any more – she needed him, needed the anchor of his presence in her room before she could sleep. She felt as though she limped through life out of step with everyone around her, apart from one grouchy old moggy.

Thus every evening she had to knock on the black door. As time passed it became more ritual than chore.

"Call me Severus," he said at last.

\*

#### *And they all lived together*

It was Sprout who noticed Hermione was coming out of her shell, when she asked her first question since the beginning of the school year.

It was Flitwick who remarked that the child's sense of humour was returning when the toast rack grew little wings and flew down the table to him.

It was McGonagall who decided her apprentice should update *Hogwarts: A History* when she found Hermione's rude comments in the margins.

It was Filch who caught her carrying her cat out of Snape's quarters at six in the morning.

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#### *In a little crooked house*

Spinner's End remained an ugly, mid-Victorian red-brick terrace under a gloomy northern sky, but within the end house the sunshine burgeoned, weekend by weekend, holiday by holiday.

Her over the road noticed new curtains and clear glass, while her across the alley remarked that she was sure she'd seen some young woman cleaning the kitchen.

All the old ladies nodded when the boards came off the house next door and sounds of knocking-through were heard.

They had a party the day Eileen's boy cut the cat-flap in the door.

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