

Draco's Problem

by Pennfana

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I was only fourteen years old when Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone was first published. There is no way that I could plausibly claim to own the rights to it or to any of the Harry Potter novels, films, etc. or any of the characters, settings or situations described and/or depicted therein.

"Mrowr!" *Hermione!*

Hermione felt a tug on her leg...damn, another nice silk stocking ruined...as her familiar tried to get her attention.

"What is it, Crooks? Have I forgotten to clean your catbox again?"

If a cat could sneer, Crookshanks would certainly be doing it by now. "MrrROWRrrr!" *No, NOT that! But you'd better not have forgotten it anyway.*

"All right, *not* that. Is it time for your flea bath, then?"

Desperately, he tried one last time. "Mrowrow! MEOWWWWWW!!!" *YOU SILLY LITTLE HUMAN! SOMEONE'S IN TROUBLE!* To emphasize this, he trotted a few steps away and stared at her, then stared at the general direction of the trouble.

She sighed. "All right, Crooks, I'll follow you. But if it's just to show me how you've torn apart another sparrow and left its feathers and entrails in various places on the staircase, *you* are putting them in the garbage."

If Crookshanks could've rolled his eyes, he would have. Honestly, just do something decorative with a bird's feathers and internal organs *once* and, instead of being proud of your amazing artistic achievement, your humans will grouch at you for it for the rest of your life!

Staring at the scene before her, Hermione tried not to laugh. Draco Malfoy was hog-tied and lying in the back of a wagon. It was garishly painted and bore a sign on the side reading "The Lost Wagon". Crookshanks floated up to the floor of the wagon, as cats are wont to do, and nuzzled the angry wizard's face. "Mrow raaow?" *See who I've brought to rescue you?*

Malfoy glared at the elderly cat. "Really, you mangy pile of fur, is *this* all you could come up with for help?"

"RRRRRRRRRRRRROWW," Crookshanks growled, then swatted at Malfoy's nose with his claws extended *just enough* so that the ingrate understood that the half-Kneazle could just as easily have maimed his face for life for the insult to his favourite human servant.

Holding back a smirk at her cat's apparent protectiveness of her, she climbed up onto the wagon herself and asked Malfoy, "How did this happen?"

"Pansy Parkinson cursed me yesterday afternoon. This happens every time I get confused."

"But why?"

"She said that she was tired of my inability to admit when I didn't know something, so she said she'd make sure that I...and anyone else who sees me...will know when it happens. And unless I let it wear off, which happens in about an hour, I have to get somebody to help me out of it. So are you going to help me or not?"

She thought for a moment. "I might."

"What's your price, Mudblood?"

She glared at him. "Be nice to me or I won't help you at all. What I'd like from you, Malfoy, is a kiss."

He stared at her. "You *must* be mad!"

"Look, do you want me to help you or not? My price is a kiss. You don't have to snog me. Tongues do not have to be directly involved. It doesn't even have to last very long. But I won't help you unless I get a kiss."

He glared at her. "All right, but I won't give it to you until you've helped me."

"*Before*, Malfoy. I don't trust you to not back out if I free you first."

Sighing, he said, "All right, Mudblood. You can have your kiss now. Just don't give me any filthy Muggle diseases."

"It would serve you right if I did." Giving him a withering glare, she leaned forward and briefly touched her lips to his. He was almost surprised at how soft and gentle her mouth was...and suddenly it was gone, and she was untying the ropes that bound him. She slid off of the Lost Wagon and as she helped him down, he slid his arms around her and kissed her. Almost before she knew it, she was responding, her hands tangling in his pale hair, his pulling her as close as they could comfortably get.

Lightheaded and dizzy, her heart pounding so hard that she thought Draco might be able to hear it, Hermione stared up at him when they finally broke apart. "Malfoy, what the hell was *that* about?"

He smirked, his arms still holding her. "You wanted a kiss, so I gave you a real one. So much better than that pathetic excuse for a kiss that you inflicted on me while I was still tied up. By the way, Granger, I'll pick you up at seven on Friday. Wear something long and purple."

"What?"

"You're going out to dinner with me, of course," he said slowly, as if speaking to someone who wasn't quite right in the head. "If I must be totally honest...and since you were a Gryffindor, I suspect that I *must* be totally honest...I've been wanting to ask you out for ages. I won't say I'm in love with you, because I'm not, but you intrigue me."

She raised a surprisingly Snape-esque eyebrow. "So you decided you'd tell me to go out with you instead, did you?"

He tightened his arms around her. "Of course I did. I *am* a Malfoy, after all. We don't actually ask for anything...we just inform people that we're going to get it from them," he smirked.

She relaxed and settled her head on his chest, smiling as she heard his heart beating as hard and fast as hers was. "All right, Malfoy, I'll have dinner with you, but my wardrobe for the evening will be entirely my choice."

Draco knew better than to argue with her.

The next day, Hermione slipped into the Leaky Cauldron. Ordering a butterbeer, she found a quiet table near the back and took out a book. After a few minutes, she heard a woman not-so-gently clearing her throat.

"Didn't your mother ever teach you that it's rude to read at the table, Granger?" Pansy Parkinson asked.

Hermione smiled. "Thank you for the reminder, Pansy, and for that little favour you did for me."

"Don't fool yourself, Mudblood, I only did it to repay the debt I owed you for putting in a good word for me with Neville Longbottom. We're not friends."

Hermione's smile grew wider. "Of course we're not. That doesn't mean I can't thank you. So, are you going to the War's-End Anniversary Ball next week?"

"I wouldn't miss it," Pansy sneered. "I suppose I'll have to tolerate your Mudblood stench there as well?"

"Oh, shut it, Parkinson. You know we'll probably have to be able to put up with each other for awhile for Neville, at least, regardless of what happens between Draco and I."

Pansy sniffed. "That doesn't mean I have to *like* it. Until next Saturday, then, Granger."

"See you, Pansy."

Author's Notes: This comes from a Saturday Night Drabble prompt from HermioneDiggory on April 17, 2010: "Crookshanks happens upon a former Slytherin in need and brings his mistress to the rescue. Romance ensues." Putting it under the "Saturday Night Drabbles" category may be something of a misnomer, since this is a Thursday afternoon and the story is exactly 1129 words long, but that's where this fic comes from, so I suppose that's where it has to go. :)

Crookshanks' vocalizations are based on those of my younger two (of three) cats, Banshee and Murphy. (Murph's the cat in my avatar on the forum here.) Both of them are chatterboxes...at least, as far as cats go.

I've seen the "artistically arranged bird guts and feathers" thing for myself. Many years ago, when Proud, my oldest cat, was still living outdoors, she killed a small bird and brought it to the back door of my house. That would've been OK, but then she decided to have a bit more fun with it; by the time she was done, its feathers and internal organs were strewn all over the patio. That morning, when I went out to feed her, there she was, sitting in the middle of the mess with a very smug look on her face. I lost my appetite as soon as I realized what all those purple-red wobbly things were and that I'd have to clean them up before they started to smell.

The "Lost Wagon" was a running joke in the chat room at the now-defunct X-Files board I used to post at, "X-Philes Unite". Basically, if you got confused about anything (or even just had to ask what the Lost Wagon was), you were now on the Lost Wagon. A few of the other regulars were also Harry Potter fans. The board fell apart this January, not through lack of use but because somebody got their hands on one admin's password and deleted everything in what appears to be a fit of jealous rage. I tried to start up a new online home for us when it turned out that XPU's owner wasn't interested in rebuilding at the old site, but after a few weeks it fizzled out. Fortunately, most of us are still in touch in other ways, but several people are no longer regularly in touch with the rest of us.

Ladies (and Seamus), if you ever read this...this one's for you. :)