

Dark Draco, the Academics, and the Ravens

by Fairfield

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Maybe if he hadn't broken up with Pansy again, had a fight with the Minister of Finance, and been threatened with a transfer to the Department of Mysteries, he would have said, "No," to the two witches. He hadn't even bothered checking out their boobs.

"It'll be a change of pace," said Padma Singh nee Patil.

"You were a wizard at it when you were in school," said Hermione Weasley nee Granger, adding some levity.

He thought about the werewolves, the charlatans, the incompetents, and the hate-filled mixed in with the occasional brilliant instructor. He could join the flotsam and jetsam that washed up on the shores of academia. It might be fun.

"Perhaps a Dark Wizard could be tolerated," he said.

"You'd be brilliant," said Padma, remembering to avoid his eyes.

"It's your best chance for a cure, I mean, with all the talent there," said Hermione.

"What did those colonials do to you?" asked Padma.

"It wasn't the colonials, it was Native American lore, and I did it to myself."

He could hear Padma saying she had heard it was two contending animal spirits; he could hear the kindness in her voice; he could sense the depths in her dark eyes that he dare not meet. There was danger here.

"It's the second and third courses in Arithmancy," said Hermione, "taught to the fourth and fifth years as you know."

"Didn't you once say Arithmancy was easy?" asked Padma. "You said there was nothing to memorize, just use a few general principles to derive anything you needed."

Several months later, it was tea time, and Draco was descending from his rooms in an unused tower to tea. He wouldn't miss the school's scones and biscuits for the world.

"A tower, not the dungeon?" Flitwick had commented. "You've changed."

"You spend time on your balcony with ravens," Hagrid had said, regarding him with less hostility than before. "And I've seen you ride with them in the evening."

Hagrid almost had smiled. "It would fit your reputation if you appeared in class with one of them perched on your shoulder."

Draco had raised his cup to salute the unexpected outburst of wit.

Now, he was musing as he descended. *Could spells be represented as surfaces in n-space? The simplest-minded of wizards could utter them. Did that mean the simple ones were surfaces of constant curvature?*

He retraced his steps. Preoccupied, he had gone three flights of stairs lower than the faculty room.

Padma arrived late having showered to remove the chemical stink of the potion lab and having changed from overalls to skirt and blouse. She poured herself a cup before noticing that Draco was sitting alone. She nodded at him and he nodded back. He had been returning her greeting in a neutral manner. Did she dare?

She approached and asked, "How are your classes going?"

"Fine. And yours?"

"Long," she said.

"It's the nature of lab work," he said.

He sniffed in air in her direction. "How are you and the chemicals getting along?"

"You berk! I showered before I came here."

She glared at him. "You're having me on. Arithmancers have so much chalk dust up their snozzles they can't smell anything."

He sniffed loftily. "Nonsense. I charmed all my chalk to behave."

"Right. Charmed chalk. It won't even let you compute incorrectly."

She gestured and a plate with a blueberry muffin hovered between them. She gestured again and divided it. "Share?"

Hagrid entered and paused when he saw the pair together. He noticed Mrs. Weasley watching with interest. *It's beginning*, he thought.

A week later, Padma was on her way to lunch when she noticed Hagrid was walking beside her.

"Ah, lass, ye be consortin' with our Dark Wizard."

"Socializing during tea is not consorting."

"Ye be an example. Others will follow."

"You're telling me I'm violating the barriers we must erect between good and evil."

"Others be looking up to you as a lady of courage and dignity, as a model for how to behave."

"I see. There's no such thing as a small amount of Dark. If I let my guard down, it will pull me in, and it will consume all who foolishly look to me as an example."

"Aye, lass."

She looked at him. "There'll be a warning sign. You can sound the alarm when I start flying with the ravens."

She left Hagrid standing in the hall with visions of witches and ravens soaring through his head. For a brief moment, he felt the exhilaration of joining them on his motorcycle.

Arriving at the dining hall, she looked around. She had discovered a new potion that morning. All the other professors were really old and they had probably heard everything already and weren't interested, except for Hermione, but it would be more satisfying to tell Draco.

Hermione joined her, listened, and celebrated. Oh well, she could tell Draco at tea unless Hermione got to him first and blabbed. That afternoon, she quit early, showered quickly, and rushed to tea. Her heart sank when she saw the two of them together, but they waved her over.

"She tells me you've done something marvelous," said Draco.

"It's a new color. Actually, not a new color. We already have them all. It's a new process. Another way of getting colors. It uses cheaper ingredients."

"Will the colors hold up? Will they fade?" he asked.

"I don't know. They seem strong. I need to get several types of cloth. How do they apply the colors anyway? I was looking for new medicines when this happened. It's a new field for me."

"A competent and adventurous soul," he said.

Did she dare? "Does that mean I'm accomplished enough to fly with ravens?"

"Oh, yes," said Hermione.

"I hadn't thought about it," said Draco.

There was a discussion. Who wanted to fly? Would the ravens accept them? Perhaps not all at once. They could take it slow. One at a time, the witches could join them on the balcony and eventually fly with them.

That evening, the birds approached the balcony but veered off when they noticed the stranger. They circled several times before four of them landed on the balcony rail. Padma sat quietly as they inspected her. Two of them flapped over to alight on the armrests of her chair. They cocked their heads and looked her in the eye. They fluffed their feathers and looked again. They looked at Draco for a signal. He nodded. The two joined the others on the railing where they exchanged glances. At another positive signal from Draco, the four pranced side to side on alternate feet, took a short flight, and returned to perform the ritual again.

"They're inviting us to join them," said Draco.

"Already?" said Padma. "I didn't bring a broom."

Draco snapped his fingers, and a broom appeared. Padma looked dubiously at the sleek racer, but Draco assured her they would take it easy.

She was airborne.

I wore a skirt. I wanted to look nice. Why didn't I wear trousers. I can fly behind Draco. He won't notice. Will he think my legs are ugly? What if he doesn't even look.

They flew low and slow along the edge of the forest. She waved at Hagrid.

They cruised along the shore of the lake before returning to the castle where they circled several of the towers.

Hermione was watching from a window. *She's wearing a skirt. Wow! Way to go, Padma.* Hermione's nostrils flared. *I don't have your figure, and that's not fair.*

After returning Padma to the balcony, the flock circled twice in salute before flying off in search of the evening's insects and rodents.

It was a few days later at tea when Draco said, "We may have to change how we do things with the ravens."

"Does that mean I don't get to fly with them?" asked Hermione.

She was containing herself. *Padma has flown with them several times, and I've already chosen my outfit.*

"No, no, we'll be more active about it. Instead of your waiting on the balcony, you and I will take short flights together, and we'll let the ravens choose to join us."

"Well, okay," said Hermione, thinking Padma had described the inspection and greeting ceremony, and she wanted the ravens to acknowledge her as a person before taking flight, not accept her as some appendage of Raven Boy.

It was two days later, and she was standing beside a Draco absorbed in some book.

He finally looked up. "Hello Hermione. What are you doing with that broom? Oh, that's right."

She looked at the book. "What in the world are Semi Numerical Algorithms?"

"You know some of the things we learned in Arithmancy? You wouldn't believe the more general version of them. And you don't need any spells to get them. Let me show you," he said, snapping his fingers to produce a pad of paper and some pencils.

"Look at this one," he said.

"Could you do that again," she said a little later, "more slowly."

Some time later, she returned to the here and now. "Omigosh, I'm late for my class."

"We'll fly tomorrow," he called after her.

Was that Dark Wizardry? Is this dangerous? she wondered as she hurried to class. *I should ask someone. But I don't know anyone who could tell me.*

Despite her misgivings, she took flight that Saturday morning. After circling the castle twice, several birds joined them. They flew along the edge of the forest where they acquired more. The ravens were performing acrobatic maneuvers between the broom-bound enchanters. An elated Hermione waved gaily at a Hagrid transfixed by what her outfit revealed.

Padma and Hermione had been escaping the rigors of school and students by having Sunday afternoon tea at an outdoor restaurant where they met Andromeda. She was keeping an eye on Malfoy Manor. Lucius, having pulled some questionable stunts, was in self exile on the continent with Narcissa. None of them had plans for the coming holidays, and it occurred to them they could celebrate solstice together at the Manor.

"The elves will be ecstatic," said Andromeda. "The pagan rituals will restore their primitive souls."

Draco, on his way to class, was walking by Hagrid talking to a group of instructors when he caught, "... they shouldna' be flashing their knickers at a Dark Wizard ..."

Damn straight, thought Draco. *All I'm getting, allowing myself, are glimpses of leg, and that's sending me howling at the moon.*

Damn, again, he thought. *If I'm honest, I'm only interested in their charms because of their intelligent faces and bright eyes. Where's my macho? None of this wussy soul stuff. I'm supposed to be a Dark Wizard. And their smiles. Two competent, ambitious women gave me a warm smile the last time we flew around the castle, and I almost collided with the East Tower.*

He continued down the hall, cursing the discipline of Arithmancy and its relentless logic that would not let him rest on the comfortable premise that he was a randomly lusty Dark One.

The holidays arrived and the witches convened at the Manor where the elves oversaw rituals that soothed the spirit and ensured that light and warmth would return to a dark and cold world.

Padma and Hermione returned to school the day before classes began and were relaxing in the faculty room when Hagrid joined them to share holiday experiences.

The two witches were puzzled. "Aren't you going to berate us about getting involved with Draco and the ravens?"

"Nay, lass. I be having a long talk with Draco. I be ready to warn him, but he be insisting that ye be safe as long as ye be staying with the fun rides."

Hagrid beamed with satisfaction. "Just ye be staying out of the coming conflict, and ye not be taking the side of your raven friends. No harm be coming to you."

"What coming conflict?" asked Hermione.

"Not help our friends?" asked Padma.

Hagrid stood to leave. "I shouldn't have said that."

"What harm?" asked the two.

Hagrid be backing away. "Forget I said anything."

"Draco has been keeping things from us." Hermione paused for breath. "But of course he has. He's shielding us from Dark Wizardry. But he should have told us about this, whatever it is. But he's being too gallant. No he isn't. This is deceitful. Oh, I don't know what to think."

"We can wait and ask Andromeda," said Padma.

Andromeda counseled caution. "It means taking sides. Conflicts have two of them, you know, and you do not know what enemy you'll make."

Neither of the younger witches appeared moved by that line of reasoning. *Well,* she thought, *if you're going to pick a side, you may as well pick one that's ubiquitous and mobile.*

Some time later, they were in the forest looking at a roughly circular brown patch with a mound of twigs and straw in the middle.

"It's habitat destroying," said Draco. "We think the mound in the middle shields its vital core."

He flung a spell at the mound. Twigs and straw flew in the air, but quickly reassembled. Everyone felt a shock and a bit of nausea. Andromeda pointed out the skeletons of ravens scattered through the brown patch.

"Oooh," went Padma and Hermione.

Andromeda was shaking her head.

"What?" they asked.

"Don't romanticize them. Ravens are not angels of mercy."

It took several weeks of practice before they were able to block most of the shock and nausea. The end of the school term found the four and a flock of ravens positioned around the entity. The sun rose and everything exploded.

Draco and Andromeda hurled spells that knocked twigs and straw sky high. Ravens swooped in to carry away the debris before it could reform. Padma and Hermione levitated the Ravens hit by the shock waves out of harms way.

A flight of ravens came in from an unexpected angle, and the shock tumbled them into the barren zone before Hermione could react. She screamed in frustration, but this lapse lost another flight. Her inner being froze, and nothing existed for her but flights of ravens that she must save.

The hours wore on until only a few wisps of straw clung to what appeared to be a misshapen mushroom. Padma was temporarily disoriented by the grotesque being, but frozen-to-the-core Hermione never faltered.

Andromeda and Draco were hurling simultaneous spells that were tearing pieces out of the strange entity. The return psychic shocks were almost unbearable. Padma and Hermione looked at each other with the sudden awareness that the other two were in danger of draining their life forces. A final paired-spell blew the remaining stem to oblivion. The almost visible shock wave knocked the four off their feet.

Padma and Hermione were trying to crawl to Andromeda and Draco. They were violently ill. They collapsed. They tried once again. They passed out. Padma and Hermione regained consciousness to find themselves under a shade tree.

"We're trying to help the injured birds," said Andromeda.

The stars were coming out when the four stumbled up the tower and into Draco's rooms. The triumph of making it that far revived them enough for a round of sherry before they fell asleep where they sprawled. Andromeda woke the next morning, observed the inert forms and the four ravens on the balcony rail, and thought, "Still life with Raven."

The slow grinding wheels of bureaucracy completed a cycle, and Draco with his Arithmancy discoveries was transferred to the Department of Mysteries. Padma and Hermione began hanging out in Draco's old rooms, admiring their light, airy nature and great view. They eased the pain by saying his departure left a hole, actually, a Dark Hole.

Twilight and the ravens arrived. Row after row of iridescent splendor. Covering the ground between the castle and the forest. Stillness until Padma and Hermione appeared on the balcony. It began.

Raven rampant with full wing spread. Wings folded. Hop to the left. Full wing spread. Wings folded. Hop to the right. A leap with a full 360. Hop to the left. Hop to the right. A wing-spread wave from right to left. A croak: **Padma** A leap with a full 360. Hop to the left. Hop to the right. A wing-spread wave from left to right. A croak **Hermione** A pause. Three rampant wing spreads. Row by row they stepped forward, bowed, and took to flight.

The thin black line of Raven vanished over the horizon.