

Bast: Operation Kitty

by *Subversa*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: The events of this story take place in two different time periods. The first is in 1998, after the events in the Prologue of Master of Enchantment. The second is in 2001, directly after the events in Chapter 6 of Master of Enchantment.

These characters and this incredible world are the creation of the incomparable JKR; only Bast is mine.

Bast: Operation Kitty

Just Before Christmas, 1998

The stern-faced elderly woman poured tea from the steaming pot into two cups and pushed one across the small round table to her companion.

"You have found a suitable candidate?" she inquired doubtfully.

"Yes. Perfect for the job, really." The old gentleman reached for a piece of Scottish shortbread, raising an eyebrow at the lady, as if to ask permission.

She waved an impatient hand at him. "I do *not* like the notion of playing tricks on the boy. Surely he has suffered enough?"

The gentleman took a bite of his shortbread, the smile of pleasure on his face causing the woman to roll her eyes. "Albus, *do* pay attention!"

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but I do so love your shortbread biscuits," he replied apologetically.

"She has owled me frequently since the beginning of the term, and she never fails to ask after him," the woman stated.

"She owls *him*, too," the man replied in a musing tone.

The lady set her teacup into its saucer with a spoon-rattling clatter. "*Why* doesn't he answer her? She is obviously distraught!"

"We must be patient with him, Minerva. He has been alone for a very long time."

"But this idea of hers what if he does harm to the animal? I cannot abide the thought of putting the creature into danger," the Animagus Transfiguration teacher said with

some agitation.

Her companion noted that her unconscious facial twitch would have done any cat's whiskers proud.

"Please do not distress yourself, my dear. I will be watching oh, very carefully. The animal will not be in any true danger."

The woman studied him for a moment and seemed to come to some decision. "So you will let her know we've set the plan in motion?" she asked, pouring herself another cup of tea.

"Yes, I owed her this morning. Operation Kitty has begun." The old man took another piece of shortbread with a pleased sigh.

Severus Snape threaded his somewhat unsteady way through the unlit corridors and down the staircases toward his dungeon quarters. He had spent years of his life making his way through this castle in the dark; his satisfying state of inebriation was no deterrent. In the week before Christmas, the corridors were virtually empty of students. The Dark Lord was vanquished and the Wizarding world had many things to be thankful for this holiday season. Severus, for one, was grateful for the three days he had just spent in London, haunting wonderful book stores and drinking good brandy in peace and quiet, away from his usual life at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Reaching his own door, he tapped the handle with his wand to unlock it and entered his rooms.

Another lazy wave of his wand lit the candles. He set his bag on the table by the door and proceeded into the sitting room, where a muttered "*Incendio*" lit the fire in the hearth. He was thinking that one more snifter of brandy before bed was a fine idea as he settled in the leather wingchair and picked up the book there, a very old copy of the collected works of Emily Dickenson.

With an oath, he surged out of his chair as something scurried across his feet something furry, with a tail. His mind first leapt to Peter Pettigrew was it a rat? With some confusion, he shook his head Pettigrew had died in the war. Severus had seen him fall with his own eyes. He glanced somewhat nervously around the room; it occurred to him that perhaps a cup of tea would be more beneficial than additional alcohol tonight, if he was going to be seeing dead Marauders at every turn. As his heart rate returned to normal, he resumed his seat in the comfortable leather chair, which had been his own for so long that it was molded to the bends and angles of his body. He picked up the book again and opened the front cover and a folded piece of parchment fell into his lap.

Severus sat for a moment simply staring at the parchment. He did not have to open it; he was fully cognizant of the contents of the missive. What was puzzling him was why the letter had been in the book of poetry, rather than bound with the others, behind the massive volume of *Botanica* on the top bookshelf. It was just another letter from her, after all. This one was the best of the lot, his favorite of them all, in which she stated with all the passion of her nineteen years that her New Year's Resolution was to never think of him again.

With an ugly sneer, he crumpled the parchment and tossed it into the fire from which it wafted back promptly to settle on the table at his elbow, smoothed itself out, and resumed its former appearance. His sneer became more pronounced the silly girl had charmed all of the letters so that he could not destroy them. Fine. At least he could put them away so that he did not have to see them.

Severus stood and reached for the stack of letters hidden behind the heaviest book on the shelf. There were over twenty of them not that he had counted them, of course and he kept them bound together with a faded scarlet ribbon, threaded with gold. Once he had the letters in his hands, he felt a strong urge to read through them, just one more time suddenly, he dropped the letters with a strangled shout as Pettigrew began to climb his trouser leg.

Severus grabbed his wand from the table and shouted, "*Incandescel*!" The darkened room was immediately filled with the light of ten thousand candles, and Severus was able to see the creature that was using his wool trousers as a ladder.

It was a minute black kitten.

With great aversion, he peeled the tiny feline from his trouser leg and held it by the scruff of its neck at a distance from his body. It was purring loudly enough for him to feel the vibration up his wrist, into his arm.

He summoned a house-elf to have the kitten removed, instructing the elf to find out to whom the animal belonged and to return it.

Then he took his suddenly-sober self off to bed.

He was sound asleep when he felt a warm, reverberating presence next to his face, on his pillow. Severus went rigid. The war had not been long over, and his years of espionage had honed his self-control. With cat-like speed, his wand was in his hand, and in the light of his unspoken *Lumos*, he saw the kitten.

Sleeping.

On his pillow.

His rage undoubtedly emotionally scarred the house-elf on the receiving end of it. The elf, called Corky, stood wringing his hands pitifully, eyes averted, and repeated over and over that he had been unable to find the kitten's owner. He assured Severus that he had fixed a box for her in the kitchen with a soft blanket and a saucer of milk and had left her sleeping there when the kitchen elves retired for the night.

"Master Snape, sir," Corky squeaked, "perhaps the kitty is being magical." The elf dared to peek up at the nasty expression on Severus' face. "The kitty is not needing help to come to your rooms if she is being magical, sir," he explained.

Severus snarled a dismissal at the elf and placed the kitten in a small wooden crate he summoned from the storeroom in his office. It still smelled of shrivelfigs, but would safely hold the animal until he could take it to the village the next day and dispose of it.

Ignoring the plaintive mewling, he put the crate in his study and placed a Containment Charm on it. Then he closed the study door, crossed the sitting room to his bed chamber, closed that door, and climbed back into his bed.

When he next woke with the kitten on his pillow, not thirty minutes after imprisoning her in his study, he shouted at her. She was quite tiny, just a ball of black fluff with a pointy face, enormous blue eyes, and an attitude. She did not so much as hop down from the bed when he began to scream at her. Instead, she began to wash herself while he ranted.

Exhausted, Severus stormed off to sleep on the sofa in the sitting room, leaving the kitten in possession of the pillow. When he later became aware of the ball of warmth curled up between his belly and the back of the sofa, he growled to himself and went back to sleep.

The next day, Severus closed the intruder into the wooden crate and personally took it to Hogsmeade. The animal Healer had an office in a shop, which sold pet supplies and which had a small selection of magical animals for sale.

"I'm sorry, Professor, but we don't operate a lost and found service," the Healer explained patiently.

"Then sell the thing!" Severus snapped. "It obviously has magical powers. Sell it; keep the gold for your trouble." Shoving the crate across the counter into the hands of the startled Healer, he stalked out of the shop.

It was really infuriating that the kitten beat him back to the castle.

Then the war of wills began. If he could not prevent the animal from frequenting his rooms, he could certainly ignore it. What he could not bring himself to do was to physically harm it. How easy it would be to simply feed it to one of Hagrid's Hippogriffs! But he didn't do it.

He began a campaign to freeze it out, instead.

Unwilling to share a pillow with the creature, he took to sleeping upright in the leather chair in his study, with his feet on the desk. The kitten would perch on the back of the chair, or if he was sleeping heavily enough, she would venture into his lap. Upon waking, he would stand, unceremoniously dumping her to the floor, and stomp off to shower. She followed him from room to room in his quarters, constantly in his presence. He refused to feed her, thinking that if she was capable of Apparating, then she could bloody well hunt for her own food. When he dined in his own rooms, she would sit on the floor in his small kitchen, watching each bite he put into his mouth.

He was relieved to find that she did not follow him to the meals he took in the Great Hall, nor did she shadow him up and down the castle corridors. It seemed that her powers of Apparition were confined to his quarters. When he realized this, he moved some things into an unused set of rooms and left the kitten in possession of the entire apartment.

A week passed before Corky, the house-elf, approached him again. This time, he was in his office. "Corky is begging your pardon, Master Snape, sir," Corky said, bowing so low that his nose nearly bumped the floor.

Severus looked up impatiently from the journal he was reading. "Well?" he demanded.

"The kitty is being sick, sir," the frightened house-elf squeaked. "The kitty is not eating, and the kitty is not sleeping, and the kitty is sitting by the door and waiting for Master Snape."

"The kitty can go the devil!" Severus snarled. "I do not wish to have a cat!"

As the house-elf bowed his way out of the office, Severus went back to reading. It was a fascinating journal article concerning the preservation of eel eyes. He read the same paragraph three times and then thrust the periodical away from him with such violence that it flew off the desk, taking a stack of papers and two quills with it. Stomping out of the office, he slammed the door with unnecessary force and charged into his quarters, ready to remove the damned cat once and for all.

The kitten lay on the floor by the door. She was on her side; her eyes were nearly closed, and she was breathing very quickly in a sickly kind of pant. She appeared so malnourished that it seemed a miracle that she could draw breath. Panicked, Severus knelt and scooped her into his hands. She did not wake or make a sound. He carried her to the table in the small kitchen and laid her upon a tea towel. From his robes, he withdrew a glass dropper and turned to the sink for water to fill the dropper. Then, he carefully opened the tiny mouth and placed a few drops of water upon her tongue, stroking her throat to help her swallow.

He needed some of the vitamin solution he prepared for Madam Pomfrey each school year. Nestling the kitten carefully to his chest with one hand, he went back down the corridor to his office, then into his storeroom to retrieve the vitamin potion. He returned to his rooms, and placing the kitten back on the tea towel, he alternately fed her dribbles of water and vitamin drops, through the night.

Dawn found him dozing at the kitchen table, one long-fingered hand resting on the kitten's fur. She roused and mewed at him, but he did not wake until she began to clean the hand cradling her.

"Your tongue feels entirely repulsive," he informed her, unaccountably relieved to see his erstwhile tormentor on the mend.

Severus nursed the kitten carefully, making sure she ate and allowing her to sleep on his pillow each night. It was not an unpleasant sensation, having another living, breathing creature purring in his hair at night. He called her Bast, after the Egyptian cat goddess. She seldom, if ever, left his rooms, and few people knew of her existence.

July, 2001

Severus led the way down into the dungeons, his fair companion following in his wake. They were each dressed casually and they carried small bags. Severus unlocked the door into his quarters and stood back to let his guest enter first.

He placed his bag on the table by the door, then took the lady's bag and placed it beside his own. A swift dark figure moved past his legs and leapt onto the top of the bookcase near the door. The cat was black from her nose to the tip of her tail, with the triangular face and china blue eyes of a purebred Siamese. Her coat was sleek and glossy, pure black, more beautiful than any animal pelt Severus had ever seen. Severus inclined his head toward the feline, and she butted his face with her head, meowing and purring loudly.

"Good evening, Bast," Severus said conversationally.

With the grace of a panther, Bast sprang onto his shoulder, her claws finding purchase in the fabric of his Slytherin Quidditch tee-shirt; she continued to head-butt him, her purrs loud in his ear.

The lady at his side stood like a stone, staring at the spectacle of Severus Snape accepting the head-butting affections of an obviously besotted cat.

Severus reached out an arm and pulled the woman to his side. "Bast, this is Hermione."

The cat immediately ceased her attentions to Severus and turned her inscrutable gaze to Hermione. Stretching her long neck, she delicately sniffed Hermione's cheek, then her ear, and finally, her throat. Severus watched this display with sardonic amusement, one eyebrow quirked at Hermione's tense acceptance of the feline inspection.

Bast pulled back from Hermione's throat and meowed once at Severus before touching her wet little nose to the tip of his over-large one. After bestowing this mark of acceptance, she head-butted Hermione once, then sprang from Severus' shoulder to the shelf of a nearby bookcase. Her landing dislodged a bundle of papers, which tumbled to the floor. Severus quickly leaned to retrieve the bundled parchment while Hermione's attention was riveted on the cat.

"Severus, she's exquisite," Hermione breathed, extending one hand to stroke the exceptionally soft black fur.

"Yes, she's quite aware of that," he replied, surreptitiously holding one hand behind his back.

"I never imagined she would be so beautiful."

"Why should you? You didn't know I had a cat," he said dismissively, taking one step backwards in the direction of his study.

"Are you a good kitty?" she cooed to the cat as she scratched the lovely head.

"...contradiction in terms..." Severus muttered.

"Or are you a bad kitty?" Hermione continued, stroking the cat's throat.

"...that's just redundant..." Severus complained.

Hermione looked around, noticing his furtive movement away from her.

"The bathroom is directly through the bedroom," he informed her helpfully.

"I don't need the loo, thank you."

"And the kitchen is that way." He nodded to the opposite wall. "If you're thirsty, or..."

"Severus? Why are you trying to get rid of me?" She took a step towards him, noting his posture. "What's behind your back?"

Bast chose this moment to meow again; Severus scowled at her belligerently. The elegant Siamese continued to meow in a talkative way, until Severus resignedly produced the bundle from behind his back. "Just some papers..."

Hermione walked up to him and took the stack of letters, bound with a faded scarlet ribbon, from his hand. She stared at them, her finger tracing the gold threads in the grosgrain, then looked up searchingly into his face as she pushed on toward him.

"These are the letters I sent you from Bulgaria... the ones you never answered."

Severus nodded mutely, seemingly embarrassed.

"And this ribbon I used it to tie my hair back in Advanced Potions... I thought I had lost it I always kept it with my cauldron, and then it went missing one day."

Severus' pale face was flushing; his eyes were darting to the side, as if seeking out an avenue of escape. Hermione continued to advance on him, and he continued to retreat until he felt the wall at his back.

"You took my ribbon from my cauldron, didn't you? You took it in seventh year, before the night when we first touched " she slapped the stack of letters against his chest, "you took it, and you kept it because you were *already* interested in me!"

The limpid brown eyes gazing up into his discomfited face were like a catalyst; Severus pulled her against him with a jerk and buried one hand in the tangle of curls pouring down her back. "What exactly is your *point*?" he demanded, fastening his own intense scrutiny on her parted lips.

The packet of letters dropped from her suddenly nerveless fingers as the brushfire passion ignited between them. "I ... I don't remember," she answered, winding her arms around his neck and swaying into his kiss.

The packet of unanswered letters landed on the floor at their feet; Bast jumped down beside the forgotten billets and curled her tapered tail about her, quite satisfied with her night's work.

The next morning, the elderly lady poured tea from the steaming pot into two china teacups and pushed one across the small table to her companion.

"Have you spoken to your parents yet?" she inquired, offering the younger woman a shortbread biscuit from the china plate before her.

"We're meeting them for lunch today," the young woman replied, taking a biscuit and nibbling on it. "I met the cat last night," she commented.

The stern face of her companion broke into an uncharacteristic smile. "Isn't she fine?" she said fondly.

"Wherever did you find her?"

"Albus found her, of course. Sometimes, it seems as if he can call creatures into being simply by his need of them." She shook her head disapprovingly. "I must confess, Hermione, that the cat was the very thing Severus needed, though I was opposed to the idea at the time. She was company to him, during that transition from spy to ... human being." She shot a sharp glance at the younger woman. "Although there are those who still question the 'human' bit..."

A soft smile lit the eyes of the bride-to-be. "All of his bits are human, I promise you."

The elderly lady choked on her tea. "Miss Granger! Please keep your observations regarding Severus Snape's *bits* to yourself!"

Severus woke in his own bed when the candles automatically illuminated, notifying him that breakfast would soon be served in the Great Hall. It occurred to him that he was naked beneath the sheets, and for a moment, he wondered why. Then the memories of the last four days flooded into his mind, and he rolled over to say good morning but she was gone.

The note propped on her pillow informed him that she had gone for morning tea with Minerva McGonagall. He groaned when he remembered their itinerary for the day, which included lunch with her parents and an evening visit with "the boys" Potter and Weasley. He pondered the dreaded components of each interview and found he could not decide which encounter he faced with more dismay.

Perceiving that he was *finally* awake, Bast playfully launched herself at the agitated movements from under the covers; she received only a firm nudge from his foot for her troubles. Abandoning her game, she curled up beside him. Severus propped himself with the pillows and began to stroke her fur while she purred loudly.

Speaking conversationally, Severus said, "Bast, Hermione is coming to live with us. And, I want you to know, she has a cat named Crookshanks..."

A/N:

Once upon a time I had a Siamese cat, who mated with an interesting, dark stranger the Severus Snape of tomcats, I like to think. In the litter of little Siamese kittens was one pure black kitty, with the physical characteristics of a Siamese. My son, who was having an Anne Rice moment, named her The Kitten Lestat. Bast is based on Lestat, who became a special needs kitty after being attacked by an adult cat when she was nine weeks old: Lestat survived the assault, only to fall prey to a strange skin disorder at the age of 3. As my husband, the erstwhile Slytherin, always says, "Bad Kitty is redundant, and Good Kitty is a contradiction in terms." Lestat's attitude was, "You may worship me, if you wish." This story is my tribute to her; she is undoubtedly climbing the curtains up in Kitty Heaven.