

Furry Matchmaking

by septentrion

Crookshanks is not pleased with his mistress' choice of partner, and decides to take things in his own paws.

A Plotting Cat

Chapter 1 of 8

Crookshanks is not pleased with his mistress' choice of partner, and decides to take things in his own paws.

Disclaimer: Hello, my name's Jo Rowling. Why doesn't anybody believe me?

This story was written in drabbles format for the grangersnape100 livejournal community.

Reread by Somigliana, who helped me make this real English.

Crookshanks felt old – ancient, but at peace. He had had very full lives; the ninth and last one had been particularly satisfying. He had been lucky enough to find a nice mistress, though he thought that she should have done something to tame her fur.

She had very nice friends, except for the red-headed one; the boy had mocked him from the beginning and had unfairly accused him of treachery; a crime of which the rat had been guilty. When it became clear that his mistress was enamoured with the prat, Crookshanks decided that it was time that he intervened.

He had liked the man-dog, so brave and loyal, but he was no more. Crookshanks knew of only one other man who was suitable for his mistress. Unfortunately, that dark-haired man had left. He knew that the wizard's gesture was considered a crime, but who wouldn't understand the necessity of getting rid of an old fogey who had tried to poison everyone with yellow pills? That act had propelled the dungeon dweller to being high in Crookshanks' esteem.

He said goodbye to his mistress by offering her a very purring cuddling and set off in search of his future master.

Crookshanks had travelled for days. An old school owl had given him the man's address, but to get there had been a bit tricky. He had had to use Muggle transportation and had nearly been caught twice because he had been travelling alone.

He was now pacing and mewing in front of a decrepit house's door on Spinner's End. The door opened slightly.

"What are you doing here?" he heard a man's voice say. "I have seen you before, haven't I?"

Crookshanks answered by rubbing himself around the robe-clad legs and purring loudly. The man sighed and took him inside.

In the meantime, Hermione was getting ready to leave Hogwarts for the Burrow the following day to attend Bill's and Fleur's wedding when she noticed her familiar's absence. She searched the castle and the grounds and asked the teachers and remaining students about him, but her half-Kneazle had neatly disappeared. She would have to use the magical tattoo that she had placed on her errant cat to find him. It would take her to where he was; she just hoped he wasn't chasing mice in narrow places. She spoke the incantation and landed on a mattress in a dark room.

Her wand in hand, she looked around a room bathed in moonlight. It was barely furnished: a bed, a nightstand, and a wardrobe. Not even a chair. She felt her cat butt against her thigh in welcome.

"Where did you take me, Crooks?" It was a rhetorical question, for the cat couldn't answer her, but she felt that it was very important to know. She scooped up her cat, but before she could stand up, someone came into the bedroom, slamming the door against the wall in their haste. She felt a wand tip pressed into her throat and fainted.

Conversation

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione meets Severus.

Disclaimer : see chapter one.

I have a wonderful beta; her name is Somigliana.

Hermione was restrained on an old couch when she woke up. The first thing she saw was bookcases running along the walls of a barely lit room. The second thing she saw was Severus Snape looking at her, his fingers crossed under his chin, his burning eyes seeking answers to unspoken questions. She felt a warm weight on her lap and knew that it was her cat when it began to purr.

"Why is your cat here? How did it find me?"

She cast a suspicious look at Crookshanks, who looked as unrepentant as the Weasley twins after committing mischief.

"I don't know either," she told cautiously. She wasn't going to tell about the magical tattoo.

"Are you sure?"

Of course, he'd easily see through her.

Neither expected Crookshanks to jump on Snape's knees. He propped his front paws on the Death Eater's chest so that his head was at Severus' eye level, and wriggled his left ear until his magical tattoo was visible.

"A magical tattoo? Not unlike the Dark Mark, it seems. Why, Miss Granger, I didn't know that you were so eager to meet me again so soon." The silky tone of his voice made her shiver.

"I'm not that eager, though I don't understand my cat's behaviour!" she protested weakly. In truth, she didn't know what to think. Her cat had always been reliable in his assessment of people. Should she trust her ex-professor, even though he'd murdered Dumbledore in cold blood?

She was sure that she'd landed in the Twilight Zone when Snape petted her familiar absent-mindedly. If she weren't still restrained, she'd think that she was having a cosy evening with a good friend. Her "host" didn't seem to mind, though. He spoke again, "It is just as well that you came to me."

Hermione, who felt very confused, chose to remain silent. It seemed Snape was not finished speaking, anyway. "I have information for the Order, but I do not have a way to convey it safely, and without provoking distrust. I think that you would be the perfect intermediary between them and me."

'There's a heat wave in Heaven,' thought Hermione. 'Snape, the traitor Severus Snape, intends on leaking information to the Order of the Phoenix!'

"What do you want in return? Which side are you on?" she blurted out.

"I just want to carry out the mission that Dumbledore assigned me."

The impression of being in the Twilight Zone intensified inside Hermione. Or maybe there was a hidden camera somewhere, and all of this would be revealed to only be a Weasley's prank. She pinched herself to ascertain that she was awake, a gesture that was caught by her ex-professor. He looked like he was very amused by her feeling uncomfortable.

"How do I know you're not leading me on a wild goose chase, or trying to extract information from me for your 'Lord'?" Her contempt as she uttered this last word was unmistakable. A hint of impatience crossed Snape's face.

"I have freed you from your restraints—you didn't even take notice of that when you pinched yourself, and your wand is in your cloak's pocket. I think that is proof enough that I do not want to hurt you!"

Indeed, she could feel the length of wood poking her in her side.

"You will gain my trust when you release me with reliable information to provide the Order with and with a way of finding you."

He snorted at that. "You already have a way of finding me," he said.

"What? Oh, of course," she said, remembering Crookshanks.

"Now, can we get down to business? My acquaintances do have a tendency to show up unannounced at any hour of the day or night."

She nodded.

"The Dark Lord has hidden magical objects in the past. I can disclose the location of some of them to you."

It was a dumbfounded Hermione who listened to Severus tell her about the Horcruxes' location, even though he didn't seem to know what kind of objects they were. Everything that he was telling her would be thoroughly checked, but it made sense. He was giving her the very means to defeat Voldemort.

Crookshanks was of the opinion that things were turning out for the better. His mistress was having a quiet conversation with her soon-to-be mate—she'd soon realise on her own that he was perfect for her, there was a fire in the hearth whose heat was bathing him, and he was being petted by his soon-to-be master. What more could a cat want in life?

Oh, yes, one more thing. Now that his mistress was distracted enough to quickly forget about the red-headed git, it was time to distract the boy from his mistress, and Crookshanks already had a plan.

Your Familiar Knows Better

Chapter 3 of 8

Crookshanks? plan to get rid of Ron.

Disclaimer: see chapter one.

Reread by Somigliana

Crookshanks went back to Hogwarts with his mistress late that night, a brand new tattoo in his right ear. The dark-haired man had explained that it'd burn sometimes and that he was to alert his mistress when it happened. The principle was the same as the "Dark Mark" (who was "Dark Mark"?), and nobody would suspect an ordinary tattoo on a cat to be an indication of a meeting with the most sought Death Eater. He'd thought that he could do this for his mistress. Besides, it was his last life, and he needed to secure his place in Heaven.

Before he went to sleep, Crookshanks put his plan for the red-headed boy into motion. He slipped into the boys' dormitory, took a maroon jumper from the boy's open trunk and took it to the fifth year girls' dormitory where he knew that the perfect girl for him was sleeping. She was bound to find the jumper when she'd be at her home the next day, to recognise it, and to take it back to its owner.

The stupid boy had never spared a look for her, he just needed a push in the right direction, not unlike his mistress.

They arrived at the Burrow the next day. Crookshanks liked the place—there were so many gnomes in the garden; they were better than mice, as it was a bit more of a challenge to catch them. He couldn't have as much fun as he'd liked to, though. He wanted to keep an eye on his mistress, lest the boy would attempt to lure her into a secluded area. He couldn't let her mate with him.

He was right to be vigilant: the red-headed boy was trying to snuggle against her while she was reading on a wooden bench outside.

"What are you reading?" the boy asked Crookshanks' mistress while putting an arm around her and laying his head on her shoulder. She didn't push him away.

"A book about the uses of the soul in magic through history."

"What?"

"Only for knowledge purposes, Ron. I've taken it from the Restricted Section. Professor McGonagall gave me permission to borrow a few books from school for the holidays."

"Why not read it later and go for a walk?"

"I'm too tired, Ron. I was feeling a bit down at the idea of not returning to school, and I didn't sleep well."

"But not tired enough to read an obscure book?" he teased her gently.

"Well, you know me, I can hardly resist a good book's appeal."

"I'm starting to believe you like books more than me."

"I like them well enough."

"All right, I'm going to see if Harry is up for a bit of flying."

He leaned over to kiss her, but his lips never reached hers: an orange fur ball had leapt onto Hermione's shoulder, creating an obstacle for his kiss. Ron drew back, furiously spitting ginger hair.

"Crookshanks," she cried. What had gotten in her cat these days?

When Ron moved away, she went back to what she was really doing when he'd come to sit with her: pondering the information Snape had provided her with the previous day, how to check its reliability, and how to have it reach Harry's ears without her being suspected of collusion with the enemy.

Actually, all of her reading and reasoning had led her to the conclusion that the information was utterly reliable. Now, she would give it to Harry bit by bit, as if she'd come across it, thanks to her research.

On her knees, Crookshanks felt content and sleepy.

Recognition

Chapter 4 of 8

Severus and Hermione get closer.

Disclaimer: see chapter one.

Reread by Somigliana.

They hadn't heard from the dark-haired man for two long months when Crookshanks felt his right ear burn; his mistress was being summoned. It was about time! At last, the red-headed boy had lost interest in her; he was more smitten everyday with the fifth-year Gryffindor girl, another Quidditch groupie, even though he hadn't worked up the courage to break up with his official girlfriend yet. As usual, his mistress would be the one to take matters into her own hands; she just needed to meet with her rightful mate once more to realise where her heart should be.

"What is it, Crooks? Are you hurting somewhere?"

Crookshanks was walking to and fro, mewing in pain, at Hermione's feet. He tilted his head to show his right ear off.

"Oh, it's him!" she whispered, lest someone would hear. Harry, Ron and she were still at the Burrow, on the verge of leaving on their Horcrux chase. They'd needed the time to have everything ready for their excursion.

She thought up an excuse and told the boys that she wanted to buy more supplies at the supermarket. The boys were stopped from going with her by two words: feminine supplies.

Severus had summoned her to Spinner's End; he didn't have time to organise a nice meeting in a discreet place. He didn't give her time to breathe before he started to talk, "The Dark Lord is planning to attack Azkaban tomorrow evening, to free the imprisoned Death Eaters. It seems that he has found an ally in there, but I don't know the traitor's name."

Oh my, how was she supposed to slip this information to the Order or the Ministry? Would they care about an anonymous tip? Or maybe ... Crookshanks wasn't the only one with great plotting ability.

"Give me an old newspaper and parchment," Hermione asked urgently.

She wrote a message, using the letters that she'd cut from *The Guardian*. She tied the parchment to Crookshanks' neck and Portkeyed him right onto Kingsley Shacklebolt's desk. She knew that the Auror would recognise her cat and take him back to her. She would pretend that she'd been looking for him for days when that happened.

Severus was impressed. "You know how to make a Portkey?" he asked, incredulous.

"Yes, I do."

"Aren't you afraid that you'll never see your cat again?"

"No, Shacklebolt is very fond of him."

They felt awkward now that the emergency had been solved.

"Perhaps you would like something to drink?" Severus managed to keep a firm tone, though he felt a bit like an idiot inwardly.

"Ah, hem, why not?"

“Please, have a seat.” He pointed her to an old couch.

“Thanks.”

“Would some tea be agreeable to you?”

“Quite, thanks.”

‘We are both acting like teenagers on a first date,’ Severus thought while preparing the tea and some biscuits on a plate. He then realised which word he had used. ‘A date? Why am I thinking of this meeting as a date?’

By the time he’d come back to the lounge/library, Severus had thought of a safe conversation topic.

“What else did you learn outside of school?”

“I’ve learned, ah, some useful spells to ward a place, to mend injuries, and such things. I’ve also found a book with very simple medicinal potions.”

“I hardly think you will need all of this knowledge when you get back to school next week.”

Hermione flushed and looked guilty.

“Well, you never know.” She kept her voice as steady as she could, but Severus was too much of a spy not to be suspicious.

“What are you planning?” He didn’t like the idea that sprang up in his mind; she’d be in too much danger out of school.

“Me? Nothing.” She wasn’t exactly lying; Harry and Ron were involved in this as much as she was.

He sighed. “I don’t have the right to tell you what to do or not, but please, be very careful.”

His unexpected words, and the fire in his eyes when he told her this, had her world moving on its foundations. What was happening to her? Even Ron taking interest in another girl didn’t feel important right now.

“I promise I will be, but there are things that must be done,” she whispered.

He nodded his understanding.

“I think it is time you go back to ... where you are supposed to be.”

“You’re right, and Kingsley’s probably at the Burrow already with Crookshanks.”

She reluctantly headed to the door. She turned to look at him a last time—the fire was still burning in his irises, and she felt a corresponding warmth in her body, which reached her soul. Desire flared in her core, but it was more than physical, and she knew he’d felt it too.

On The Couch

Chapter 5 of 8

Severus and Hermione on the couch.

Disclaimer: see first chapter

Chapter reread by Somigliana

Harry and Ron had never quite understood why they had to be burdened with Crookshanks’ company on their chase for the Horcruxes. The animal regularly disappeared, forcing Hermione to look for him for endless hours. They felt like they were losing precious time. What they never caught, however, was that she withdrew from conversation each time they spoke ill of Snape, and that it was always after one of their Snape bashings that they found Crookshanks’ fur balls in their sleeping bags. The cat was tempted to do something much worse; he just didn’t want his mistress to scold him.

Crookshanks had the feeling that he had fulfilled his destiny. After weeks of secret meetings, thanks to his magical tattoo, his mistress was in the first stages of the mating ritual with the dark-haired man. From his point of view, on the floor in front of the couch, he could see their lips locked together; they sometimes parted a bit, yet their tongues didn’t subscribe to the idea of parting, and soon they were lip-locked again. They were both humming some kind of seduction song—a mix of human words, low rumblings and soft moans. Soon they would be one.

Severus’ body and mind were on fire; kissing Hermione wasn’t like anything he’d ever done until now. The softness of her lips, the insistency of her tongue, the grip of her hands on his shoulders, his own grip on her hair and back, were all creating unknown sensations in him, sensations that he was half-afraid to name.

In the middle of this heated snogging session, his eyes met the cat’s ones. In a flash, he understood that the beast had set them up. He managed to nod in acknowledgement without stopping kissing Hermione, thus showing he wasn’t upset at all.

This wasn't the first human mating that Crookshanks had witnessed. It could nonetheless be the last; at his age, you never knew. He took a few steps back and went on watching how his mistress snaked her arms around the man's frame, how she clung to his body. He heard the man's virile moan of pleasure at the feeling of her young body seeking his.

"Hermione ..." Half-pleading and half-longing, Severus tried to withdraw from her embrace.

"No, let's continue. We don't know if we ever will have another opportunity."

From his spot, Crookshanks saw them surrender to their passion.

They took their time, as if they would never make love again. Well, not enough time to leave the couch for a bed, but their movements weren't hurried according to a cat's criteria. The dark-haired man stripped his mistress himself up until her last piece of clothing. Some of it got caught in her fur, but nothing could deter the man's mind to have her naked.

"Take your clothes off!" Hermione tugged at Severus' shirt, distracting him from her rosy nipple. He complied very willingly, keeping his burning eyes on her, and soon found himself as undressed as she was.

The next part was always a bit of a mystery to Crookshanks. Cats were very straightforward when it came to sex; humans needed to stroke each other with their hands and their tongues. His masters—as he was starting to think of them—weren't an exception to this rule. Actually, they were acting as if they wanted to memorise the curves and angles, sweetness and bitterness, of the other's body. They were still singing that song of seduction, much more loudly now than at the beginning.

After a very long time, at last, they joined. They never ceased to sing.

Your Cat Will Never Let You Down.

Chapter 6 of 8

Voldemort's end. What will happen to Severus?

Disclaimer: see first chapter

Reread by Somigliana. I must commend her for her patience.

No basking in post-coital afterglow for Hermione and Severus. As it was, Ron and Harry cast her suspicious looks when she came back hours later, Crookshanks in her arms, exuding a deep-rooted elation.

"He was taken by an old lady who believed him to be a stray cat. I had to sit and listen to her for hours before she let me take him without calling the World Society for the Protection of Animals," she explained to them.

It was so like Mrs Figg's attitude toward her cats that the boys didn't imagine their friend could be lying to them.

Two months later, Severus told Hermione during one of their stolen rendezvous that the Dark Lord would leave Nagini, his pet serpent, alone in his house the next Monday night, while he would be going after Arthur Weasley himself. Ron's father had escaped within a hair's breadth of death once more—being forewarned helped a lot with that. Harry was able to douse Voldemort's snake with a lethal potion—brewed by Severus for the occasion. Crookshanks had been waiting with anxiety for his mistress' return that day. Who in their right mind would go and face an enormous snake willingly?

The Dark Wizard understood then that he always had under-estimated his Nemesis and put all his intelligence into building a mortal trap for the young man.

Just as predicted, Ginny Weasley didn't board the Hogwarts Express when the Christmas holidays came. "Too risky," the Order thought. Two Orders members were waiting for her at the school gates to accompany her on the Knight Bus. They literally pushed her in the bus before they checked if a foe wasn't lurking in the environs of the place, when the conductor, who was under the Imperius Curse, grabbed Ginny and Disapparated with her.

"Mister Potter, your dear friend will wait for you at Godric's Hollow on Christmas Eve. This will be the time to settle our disagreement.

Lord Voldemort."

Harry, with the missive clutched in his hand, was seething. "I will go and make him pay for his crimes!"

The adults were trying to make him see reason, to no avail, contrary to Ron and Hermione, who understood that refusing to meet the tyrant was just postponing the inevitable. In the end, everyone was making plans for the battle—including Crookshanks, who was not going to sit and watch his masters be killed.

Hermione snuck out of the Burrow that night with Crookshanks in tow. She needed to talk to Severus.

"Severus, have you heard—"

"The Dark Lord has just told me about Miss Weasley's abduction. Don't worry; it isn't in his plans to have her abused."

“Harry has decided to meet him.”

“I'm not surprised. I suppose the Order is preparing something?”

She nodded and told him what those plans were. They made plans of their own about what they would do after the war, whoever would win it. Crookshanks listened to them closely, and purred his approval when they kissed.

The battle had been fierce, but Harry had managed to throw the same potion that had killed his familiar at Voldemort. After the Dark Wizard's death, the remaining Death Eaters were easily rounded up. Even Severus was caught. “Traitor!” The insult was thrown to his face by the Order members still standing, but when, in spite of Severus' defenceless state, Remus tried to hex him, he found himself with a very irate ginger cat clawing at his face. Crookshanks had invited himself to the battlefield and was defending his master.

“What's happening?” asked Hermione, who had just left Harry's side.

The argument that took place at that moment was as epic in proportion as the battle itself had been. Hermione was arguing Severus' case with the ferocity of a barrister in court under her friends' incredulous eyes while Crookshanks was doing his best to prevent any attempt of a hostile approach to his master.

“He's helped us. He told me where to find Hufflepuff's cup, when Nagini would be alone, he made the potion that has killed the snake and Voldemort ...”

“He was only saving his skin!” Harry yelled.

“He told me about the attack planned against Mr Weasley!”

“But not about Ginny's kidnapping!”

“I was not informed beforehand of Miss Weasley's abduction!” Severus hissed from behind Hermione.

An Auror stepped between the angry young people. “Severus Snape is to be put in jail and tried. Only the Wizengamot will decide of his fate.” He seized Severus' arm and frog-marched him where a cluster of Death Eaters bound by an Anti-Disapparation Jinx were waiting to be taken to Azkaban. They were soon carted off to the wizarding prison by Portkey.

The Aurors were too late to prevent a cat from jumping into Severus Snape's arms and going with him.

The Cat's Decision is Law.

Chapter 7 of 8

How the Order is convinced to do the right thing.

Disclaimer: see first chapter.

Somigliana and DacianGoddess have made this chapter better.

‘Is having a cat against the rules?’ wondered an Azkaban guard. The wizarding prison's staff was indeed in a quandary; never, ever before had a prisoner arrived with a familiar in his arms—the animals were usually confiscated before their arrival. Besides, this one was impossible to remove from his master's arms; it was as sweet-tempered as the ex- professor. ‘To hell with it! It'll share its master's fare!’

“Keep your beast!” the guard finally snarled at Severus. “Just make sure it doesn't wander too much; you never know what's lurking in here!”

Severus and Crookshanks just sneered at him.

While man and familiar were shown to their new quarters, Hermione was taking the brunt of her friends' heinous reactions. This she'd expected and braced herself to face it. What was unexpected, and therefore most welcome, was the Weasley family's support—minus Ron and Ginny, who hadn't known about the tip that had saved their father.

“You leave her be,” Arthur said venomously to an Auror ready to take her to the Ministry for a close interrogation. The Ministry official had seen Arthur Weasley in battle and wisely chose to back down.

“Thank you, Mr Weasley,” Hermione told him afterward.

“For my part, I'd like to know how you came to be in contact with Snape, and to work with him to boot!” Remus was so angry that he was nearly growling; Molly surreptitiously checked the moon—only the first quarter.

Hermione conceded. “All right, but neither here, nor now. I'll tell you everything tomorrow at nine a.m. at Order Headquarters. In the meantime, I'll be at my parents'. I need to shower and to sleep.”

She went to her parents, but after she'd taken a dark robe covered with ginger hair from Spinner's End; it'd make a nice nightdress.

The air was thick in the Grimmauld Place kitchen the next morning. Two camps could be made out by the way people were sitting: a red-headed one, except for Hermione, and the rest. They all had something in common, though: they questioned and cross-examined her at length, hardly letting her use the loo if they themselves didn't feel the need to.

"And you thought Christmas had come early, and Santa Severus would have all the answers on how to defeat You-Know-Who?" Moody grunted.

"He wouldn't be caught dead wearing red! But his information proved to be invaluable!" Hermione replied testily.

"That it did." Arthur had given her his support, as had all his family, even if Ron and Ginny were reluctant.

"You took a great risk by trusting that man," Molly told her in her most motherly voice, "but in the end, it's saved my Arthur."

"How did you come to trust Severus?" McGonagall asked.

"I trust my cat."

She was faced with blank expressions.

"Crookshanks, my cat, was the one to find Severus, ah, Snape. I found my cat at his home."

Bedlam followed her statement. Her cat had found him while the best Aurors and the Order couldn't?

She could make out words like "that orange cat" and "squashed nose". Suddenly, there was silence.

"You're worse than the Hogwarts professors in a staff meeting!" McGonagall cried. "Miss Granger," she said, looking at Hermione, "is that cat the ginger one whom I've seen with you at school?"

"Yes, Professor."

"Is he reliable?"

"Very, professor. He's half-Kneazle, and he knows when to trust people. He's already shown it in the past."

Hermione cast a significant look towards her two best friends. They understood the message, and, having been made unable to speak, courtesy of the Headmistress' spell, nodded their agreement.

Things became as easy for Hermione as her first Wingardium Leviosa as soon as Harry conceded that Crookshanks had never been wrong in his assessment of people. McGonagall lifted her Silencio spell, and the Order's members listened to her intently. In less than two hours, the split around the table was between Mad-Eye Moody and the rest.

'Leopards, especially old leopards, never change their spots,' Hermione reflected rather uncharitably.

"Now, we ought to organise Snape's defence in court," announced Arthur, who'd become the Order's de facto leader.

Hermione was in her element; that sounded like planning her friends' revisions.

A New Life For more Than One

Chapter 8 of 8

Life after Azkaban.

Disclaimer: see first chapter.

Thanks to my betas Somigliana and Dacian Goddess

Severus was freezing in his cell; the guards had pretended not to know how to perform a heating charm! Severus nonetheless thought it prudent to bite back the scathing answer that was sitting on the tip of his tongue. He could always cuddle Hermione's cat to get some heat. Besides, he'd become very fond of her familiar; all the more because the guards were wary of approaching him and his sharp claws. Said familiar started to squirm in his lap.

"A visit, Snape," a guard said from the corridor. Surprised, Severus stood abruptly, but Crookshanks had beaten him to Hermione's arms.

The situation wasn't right; his masters ought to be together in a warm house. However, Crookshanks was at a loss about what to do. He'd kept the mean men away from his master, tried to keep him warm, but how to get out? He mewed his concern at his mistress, for she seemed to be able to get around freely. She petted him.

"You've been a good cat, Crooks. Now, I must ask a favour of you: will you stay with Severus? He needs company, and I can't stay myself."

Her tone was reassuring; perhaps his mistress had a plan.

After a few days in the inhospitable place, Severus and Crookshanks were taken to the Wizengamot. The half-Kneazle spotted his mistress right away on one of the

benches, with her friends all around her, whispering among themselves. She smiled to them, and love shone in her eyes. Crookshanks knew then that no harm would come out of this strange meeting.

Well, almost no harm; he was unceremoniously dislodged from his beloved master's arms by strange chains that pinned the man to the chair. He leapt back onto his master's lap while a lion-like man stood up in front of them.

From that moment on, everything proceeded smoothly. Even if Crookshanks couldn't make head nor tail of what was happening—why did so many people feel the need to change their place and to sit on the chair next to theirs?— he could feel his master's growing elation. He started purring.

"Not long, now," Severus told him. "They can't believe that even Potter is on my side!"

Every Order member, save Moody, had testified in his favour; the Wizengamot had needed three days to listen to all of them, and ten minutes of whispering to reach a decision about Severus' fate.

Pandemonium took over the throng as soon as Minister Scrimgeour announced, "Severus Snape is acquitted!" Three days ago, there had been a consensus about his culpability; now, he was considered an unofficial war hero. It was an ordeal to get him out of the Ministry unscathed from yelling groupies. Cries of "Severus" or "You're my hero!" were heard; sweaty hands greedily gripped him but soon retreated, more to escape Crookshanks' ire than Severus' ineffective glares. The cat wouldn't let anyone other than his mistress touch him. He knew that fidelity between mates was of the utmost importance in human matters.

Severus feigned exhaustion and went back to his house without waiting, Crookshanks still clinging to him. No amount of crooning or false promises could convince him to let go. Everyone then scattered to their respective homes, except that "home" didn't mean the same for everyone; Hermione's home was known by the public at large to be at her parents', while for Severus and her, it was on Spinner's End. He didn't wait long for her to arrive.

"Severus!" she said between kisses. "You know that I don't have to leave soon this time?"

He took her to bed straight away.

Crookshanks felt old—ancient, but at peace. He had had very full lives; the ninth and last one had been particularly satisfying. He watched his master take his mistress in his arms, his lips never parting from hers. He watched them disappear up the staircase, the human song of seduction drifting to his ears.

He curled up on the rug in front of the fire, mesmerised by the kaleidoscope of red and gold colours, lulled to sleep by the soft warmth the embers were emitting. When he opened his eyes later, Heaven's doors were standing open in front of him.