

Chirality

by expected aberrance

Women... have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing in slumber fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no... One-shot

Chirality

Chapter 1 of 1

Women... have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing in slumber fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no... One-shot

Chirality

She couldn't scream while I held her close

I swore I'd never let her go

-The Killers

Was it some sick sign of affection?

-Eve 6

Chirality: the property of not possessing a superimposable mirror image.

She was sinking into the horrible red at the corner of his eyes as his voice reached her in rhythm lacking meaning, eclipsing the shouts and commands of the guards. The syllables crept around her consciousness like a thick, greasy smoke, rubbing its way through her thoughts even as the iciness of the bars cut into her hands and face. *They're going to kill him right now, aren't they where'd they get the Dementor Harry I'm fine I'll be alright where's Ron Snape didn't...*

Angular would be a kind way to describe the way his skeletal structure stood out from his flesh, as if one were at odds with the other and refused to occupy the same space.

He was always cool to the touch, his skin a dry coating over the spun-glass of his thin body. An osteologist's dream, she joked to herself as her hands traveled the sharp contours of his back and limbs. Perversely fitting, only his mouth and genitals exuded any sort of warmth as he wrapped himself around her, in her, a blanket of sticks and reptilian skin. He always gripped her a bit too tightly, occasionally leaving bruises on her legs, her breasts, her back. He would wake soon and leave her with the location of the next Horcrux for her troubles. If he had been there at all.

...she was wrenched away from the cell in strong arms, a body shifting and putting itself between her and Snape but not breaking the eye contact between them. It was Harry, who had tears streaking through the blood and dirt caking his face...

She felt and could not see his long, cold fingers, pale and glistening, slip in between organs and glands. The pain that should have accompanied this trespass was filtered out, leaving only the more disturbing feeling of utter wrongness as he kissed her with hands underneath skin. One clutched her beating heart gently, the other exploring the outer surface of her womb even as he pushed his sex inside her. She knew not whether this was dream or fantasy, nor which of them had initiated it.

...Ron, good God, Ron was on a stretcher in the corner...

She'd thought briefly of exploring her deepening relationship with Ron, as Snape never specified that their situation be monogamous, but could not subject her best friend to such deception and cheapening of what they shared.

...she watched them lift the only thing tethering Ronald Weasley to this world, pleading for them to listen that it wasn't a curse he'd cast, that she'd seen in his mind...

She was disgusted to find that she was feeling... jealous? Why bother to call her if he already had company? He couldn't help her with that woman present, and obviously he'd not have use for her.

Come join us, Hermione. He didn't bother to hide his amusement, even sparing her a quick glance as he escorted the clinging woman and her frippery down the hall.

The woman giggled and batted her eyes drunkenly, probably imagining herself to be enticing, as she bumbled through removing her shirt and tossing it to the floor with practiced insouciance. She seemed not to notice Snape's blank stare, or that he was adding something to the glass of wine he'd apparently given her earlier from a vial procured from his robes. This confounded Hermione even more than the woman's presence; his blatant doctoring of the drink was in direct violation of the art he'd made of surreptitiously administering potions. Who was this woman, and what did he want with her?

"A monetary supporter of Our Lord's organization for years. Quite loyal, I'd expect. Her only trespass seems to be making her way into Lucius Malfoy's bed. Narcissa is quite... unforgiving when it comes to her husband's lapses."

Hermione started when she realized Snape had been addressing her rather than the woman trying unsuccessfully to unbutton his robes. He shoved her away lightly and handed her the full glass. She drained it with a slurred laugh.

"Nevertheless, her name was on the list, and it isn't my place to question the orders of Our Lord." He smiled coldly at the woman, who was just beginning to suspect that the evening would not end according to plan. She stumbled toward the door before he caught her wrist and strapped her without magic to the smooth metal table that appeared to have been transfigured from the footrest Hermione knew belonged there.

"I need her for several potions I'm required to brew now that I'm happily in the full service of the Dark Lord. Come here."

She moved to stand beside the table next to him without conscious thought. She saw the confusion in the woman's eyes begin to be replaced by fear, then desperate plea as Snape handed her a blade from a tray that could have been found in a Muggle surgery. The cool metal hummed in her palm, and as she stared at it, she felt a strange separation beginning at the backs of her eyes, pushing toward the base of her skull.

No! She was trapped in the hand clutching the scalpel as it moved toward the captive woman.

"She's dying. Nothing you could possibly do now would help. We need to harvest several of these organs alive. There's a good girl."

She felt him pressing behind her, his cool hands kneading at her neck.

"You sick pig. You're getting off on this, aren't you?"

"Not quite yet." His breath came across her ear as he molded himself to her, directing the scalpel she clutched toward the woman's abdomen.

"It's easier if you imagine her to be already dead. She will not live to see the sunrise, never wake again, never eat, neverfuck another, so it's not so wide of the mark."

His other hand had crept to her breast and plucked her nipple with the emphasis.

"Buck up, girl. This would be standard training for an apprentice a few years back--"

"This exactly?" She jerked her head back over her shoulder at him. He pinched her nipple again, a bit harder.

"Don't be impertinent. As I was saying, the use of human flesh beyond hair was quite common before the twelfth century; they only started finding alternatives when the practice became distasteful. The ingredients are no less useful now. Of course, the maker generally grew whatever he took back for the provider in those days. Our specimen will be less fortunate."

"What did you give her that wouldn't interfere with the..."

Even in her dissociated state, she couldn't finish the sentence with such an unfeeling word as 'ingredients.' He inferred the rest or read the complete thought in her mind, as he still answered.

"A preparing draught that shuts down higher brain function and voluntary motor control while keeping sensory impulses and involuntary processes active. Can you tell me why?"

She was evidently supposed to be able to answer the question and continue the live dissection simultaneously, as he began nibbling at the base of her neck after asking.

"To keep blood flowing to the organs needed."

"And?"

"To have the... victim... feel pain in order to enrich the organs with the addition of human hormones?" She refused to call the dying woman in front of her a specimen.

"Very good." He slid a hand in between slacks and underwear at her hip. "This formula is similar in design to the Draught of the Living Death, with the addition of zombie cerebrospinal fluid for quick absorption and transport to the brain and venom of *Pepsis formosa*, or Tarantula Hawk. Quite nice for preparing the organs for use while maintaining their integrity."

"We are removing the kidneys and liver to use in a panic-inducing potion that I've adapted for air-borne usage. There is apparently a weakness in the emergency wards guarding certain sections of the Aurory. Voldemort has a spy in the Aurory who lacks clearance for the information he desires, but it will be unwarded and available during a perceived attack on the Ministry. It seems the Ministry has for once managed to locate its arse, albeit using both hands and some outside assistance, and has been keeping the Dark Lord off-balance. I cannot afford to sabotage this potion, as it's regrettably been fully tested already. We need to find another way for those files to be absent during the raid."

And when she was done cutting, cataloging, and removing what he required, Snape entered her and took her against the table from which the eviscerated woman stared at her with glassy, dead eyes. His release triggered her own, and as she climaxed, the part of her that had been silently screaming in the back of her mind was freed as guilt,

horror, and physical pleasure rushed in. Pulling herself loose of his grasp, she lurched away from the table. She fell to her knees on the worn hardwood and hunched forward with hands flat to the floor, a splinter digging into her left palm, and was no longer able to keep the contents of her stomach down. The entirety of what she had done to the woman played over and over again as sobs and heaves wracked her body. Her hands were streaked in blood and bile; she would never wash the yellow and red from them.

"What did you do to me?" He had come to stand over her, close but not touching. She had thought no part of herself capable of the monstrosity she'd just committed, and while she understood why -- his need for her to know him and what he was -- she could not forgive him.

...dried blood, some his, some hers, a great deal undoubtedly the Dark Lord's, cracked with his facial contortions as he spat invective at her...

"Have you ever wondered why the task of completing a potion with many ingredients is so much more difficult than two simpler potions; why it is that the addition of factors in sequence influences the precarious outcome more than the individual complexity of the steps? Any small error is not masked by the subsequent steps, but compounded, enhanced until an idiot of Longbottom's caliber has the potential to annihilate the world while attempting to brew Wolfsbane."

She looked at him in doubt.

"I exaggerate, but not by much." He offered her a rare smile, unique in its honesty.

...she felt something familiar crawl through her mind and settle above her eyes...

She'd been there for hours before finding the parchment. The wards on the old house still seemed intact, the Fidelity Charm unbroken, but Moody had refused to let her come unattended, informing her that no one was available to accompany her on a mission he deemed worthless. A book on embalming had revealed itself after a charm to really be a copy of Gulliver's Travels, which had been so out of place among the Dark Arts texts that she felt almost obligated to investigate further. The writing had been stuck between the pages where the protagonist encounters the struldbrugs, suggesting a unique sense of humor on the part of the placer. The room had spun as she felt the pull of a Portkey, and she barely had time to berate herself for her carelessness before she found herself elsewhere. An arm pinned her tightly to a body behind her as a hand removed her wand from a pocket.

"Miss Granger, you are quite fortunate the dogs were otherwise occupied today. That was quite foolish, going about unescorted."

The familiarity of the cold, low voice was perhaps less assuring than not knowing the identity of her attacker. Snape released her, pushing her just enough so she stumbled toward a ratty bed, pocketing her wand in the same movement. He looked unhinged, as if his sanity had not followed in his flight from Hogwarts those few weeks back. His black eyes were covered in an unhealthy sheen as they focused on hers. She lunged toward the only egress in the small room, but was not quick enough to dart around Snape, who had most likely anticipated her move anyway. A wordless spell flung her back.

She glared at him in mute anger and frustration, escape plans twirling uselessly in her mind.

"What? No choice words for the traitor? My, it required quite a bit silencing you, but the peace seems almost worth the expense. Nothing about how you knew all along?" He bared his teeth in a sneer.

"No, I trusted you because Dumbledore did. You planted that information, the paper in the book?" She looked around desperately, but there was no break in the paint-peeled walls.

"In part. Regulus had left the note in the house; I merely moved it to a more obvious location. Unfortunately, he had little further of any use in that regard, as he apparently didn't know where the other Horcruxes were kept. What you found was all there was. Potter still hasn't learned to guard his mind, I see. You acted on it even sooner than I expected though. Full marks, Miss Granger." He gave her a loose approximation of a smile; the accomplishment of gaining his respect after all these years was bitterly ironic, under the circumstances.

"Whatever for? Shouldn't you be taking me to the Dark Lord now or something?" She couldn't tell where he was keeping her wand, and his never wavered from his grip aiming it at her neck.

"Do you wish to go? It can be arranged, but my intent for this meeting was a simple discussion."

"All that just to talk to me?" The fear that had been fueling her thought processes now changed to bewilderment.

"Would you suggest I sashay up to the front door of Order Headquarters, wherever it may be at the moment, and ring the bell? I have a proposal for you, one that should be mutually beneficial. Now that my agreement with Dumbledore is null and void, I require a sort of renegotiation. In the spirit of Gryffindor barter, I'll show you what I require first."

He chanted something too low for her to recognize as he stared into her eyes, and the black of his pupils was replaced by an image that grew to fill her vision. The woman underneath Snape, most likely a prostitute, was making a valiant attempt at not looking directly at him or touching anything more than his cloak and robes. She could feel her distaste because he had. He broke the connection and stepped toward her.

"In exchange for my life, I'd be your whore?" she spat at him.

"Just your life? My, what a sacrifice on your part for such a cheap thing. No, Miss Granger, I know your type well enough." He drew a hand to her cheek, lightly brushing a stray hair from her face in a mockery of a caress. She flinched away from the alien touch. "Any minute now you'll declare that you'd prefer death rather than endure such tribulation. Shall I fetch the Sorting Hat so that you may summon the Sword of Godric Gryffindor and fling yourself upon it? I think not.

"I could let you go, Obliviate you. How far would you get, do you think? And what of Potter, the Weasleys, your parents? Will you shield them all with your righteous virtue? Without the Headmaster, the attacks will be daily." His voice dropped to a menacing purr. "Surely you realize the odds of one of your own coming up; there are quite a lot of Weasleys, after all. I am in a position to ensure the decreased likelihood of such an occurrence.

"You know Potter is inadequate to survive his next encounter with determined Death Eaters, much less the Dark Lord in his current state. I can aid you in that as well. I can also help you find the remaining Horcruxes. How successful do you think Potter would be on his own at that? Perhaps if one of them happened to be a Snitch, he might have a chance."

"We already have your book."

"If you trust in the raw fumbblings of a bitter and disillusioned boy over knowledge gleaned from decades of enslavement to the Dark, then be my guest. Personally, I'd have chosen experience. But then, we do think differently in that respect. Perhaps a reliable source of Wolfsbane would be enough to entice you?"

"You're an Order member! You know Remus needs it!"

"Correction; I was, and will be one again, provided that we come to terms. Besides, he can always lock himself in the Shrieking Shack. You could even visit."

He stepped back to smirk down at her from next to the bed. "How can I trust you?"

"Despite my distaste for it, particularly considering recent events, my former contract involved an Unbreakable Vow. Would a renewal of such be sufficient guarantee?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"With Dumbledore's blood on my hands, I will never be free, even in the most perverse sense of the word. Redemption is well beyond my reach. All I ask is for a bit in exchange for the proviso to my death warrant. You." He looked at her with such intensity, not explicitly sexual, but unsettling nonetheless.

"Why did you kill Albus Dumbledore?"

"Because I was ordered. He held me to my promise and in the same act, ensured that he would never fulfill his. Forgive me if I do not weep more for the manipulative bastard." His tone changed from cajoling to clipped as he reached in his robes, removing her wand and a smaller object. He handed her the wand and a facsimile of the Eiffel Tower a few centimeters long. After the shock of suddenly having to associate Snape with sex, the phallic nature of the object did not escape her notice.

"I will give you three weeks. If your answer is yes, speak aloud 'Caliban' and it will take you -- and only you -- to me. After that time period, it will cease to be of use.

"Go!"

He must have triggered another password in the Portkey, as the room began spinning around her for the second time that day, only to reform as her own bedroom.

...the Dementor floated past her towards him, the door of the cell opening of its own accord...

She found him in odd places about her brain, picking through her memories as if he owned them. Her innocent explorations with Victor were laid bare before his eyes, but his fascination with her maturing sexuality was more uncomfortable. He'd taken particular interest in the night she first ventured exploring her sex, afraid at any second her parents would burst in with preternatural knowledge and disapproval. He stood over her bed, watching intently as she touched herself, and she was unable to make him leave.

...Snape didn't even glance at the embodiment of fear approaching him...

A practical girl, she decided within a week that if she was willing to give her life for Harry, she ought to be able to loan it for him as well. It was another week of research into every aspect of the Unbreakable Vow to formulate it perfectly so Snape would have no loophole to exploit. And so, almost exactly two weeks from the night he pulled her into that hovel of a hotel room, she took the innocuous souvenir in hand and uttered the prescribed phrase.

"Caliban."

She was transported the center of a small room. A few articles of old but tasteful furniture were scattered around her, and the dark walls were lined with bookshelves. Perched on the endtable next to her was a note.

'I will be with you shortly. Make yourself comfortable.'

It was perhaps the most polite writing of his she'd ever seen. Knowing her as he did, it seemed to be an open invitation to examine the library surrounding her. The tomes were organized loosely by subject, the internal order of each section probably a quirk of the owner, who was, she assumed, Snape. The selection was far more varied than any private collection she'd been in before, which was certainly saying something; biology texts were scattered among Potions monographs, Muggle and Wizarding fiction were interspersed on the shelves. One section in particular caught her eye with an even distribution of mathematics, Arithmancy, physics, and Dark Magic, arranged, to the uninformed observer, seemingly at random. She pulled an unmarked volume between the works of Galois and Veneziano that, upon opening, appeared to be a record of some sort of research. There were quite a few of these scattered about the section.

'Administered treatment to subject; no change. Addition of pain stimulus not significantly effective in controlling adverse reaction to...'

"I'm so relieved to see your past experience in strange libraries hasn't dampened your boundless curiosity."

Ignoring his barb, she closed the book and returned it to the shelf, turning toward him. "I'll do it, but only if you tell me what Dumbledore offered you, what you apparently couldn't get anywhere else."

"Straight to the point, as always. That, however, was not a part of our agreement."

"If you want me to trust you, you'll give me an answer."

"Very well." His smile was characteristically unpleasant.

"Dumbledore implied that you switched sides out of guilt for Harry's parents."

"I'd thought you were a more disciplined thinker than that, Miss Granger, to confuse the cause and effect of a thing."

She thought a bit. "Then it was what made you betray them, rather than their deaths specifically?"

"What you know as Dark magic is really a facet of a power much older than wizardkind, a force I've been bound to for a very long time. With Dumbledore's aid, I would have been free of it. Now you have your answer. Are you prepared to uphold your end of the deal?"

It felt as though she had made a pact with Mephistophiles himself.

"I only want your mind and body, Miss Granger. You may keep your soul for now."

She looked at him, startled. He just laughed.

"It was written all over your face, girl. Let's get on with this, shall we? The spell requires discharge of bodily fluids, and since I'm disinclined to slit either of our wrists at the moment, we'll have to improvise. Besides, it will be a good opportunity for you to get accustomed to your duties."

She grimaced. "What do you want me to do?"

"Manual stimulation will suffice."

He advanced towards her and she retreated with each step instinctively until she felt a bookshelf at her back. He drew in close enough so she could see the pores in his sallow skin, his body almost but not quite touching her, and planted his hands at either side of her head on the bindings behind her. If she moved at all, she'd brush up against his wrists.

"Touch me. Please." His tone was coolly polite, and she felt an uncharacteristic urge to violence.

"There are more unpleasant ways to do this."

She swallowed heavily and set about her task with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. She placed both hands on the thin shoulders caging her, carefully focusing on where the high collar of his robes revealed his prominent Adam's apple rather than the eyes boring into hers.

"Brave girl." The comment drew her gaze upward, and he whispered something beneath her hearing. Suddenly she could feel the cool, unnaturally dry skin beneath her hands, the interlocking bone and sinew of his shoulders, though the unyielding black cloth of the robe remained to sight. Startled, she stilled, then thought better of it, as it would only prolong the exchange. She slid her palms downward over the sharp curve of his collarbone to rest flatly on his chest, hairless, from the feel of it. He must have

been enjoying this on some level, for his heartbeat was quick and heavy on her fingers despite his placid outer appearance. It took a few moments for her to realize she felt the pulse most, improbably, in her left hand.

"Situs inversus?"

He nodded, and she felt him draw deeper breath to add, "From birth, not spell damage."

She filed the knowledge away and continued her assigned tactile exploration. Resting her left hand over the stub of his right nipple, she moved her other hand down his chest and stomach, her intent clearly to end the encounter as soon as possible. She gripped his erection and began stroking him. He pressed his face into her neck, his oily hair sliding over the skin of her throat as he pulled her to him, leaving only enough distance between them for her to manipulate him. He groaned, muttering as his release coated her stomach underneath her shirt. He must have cast that spell on both of them.

Then it felt as if the membrane encasing her brain had been peeled back within her skull, admitting careful hands that played over her mind lightly, but with purpose. This was nothing close to how Harry had described it, a more intimate act even than she had imagined. Her mind seemed to expand into the new space around the manipulations until it touched another that was older and darker. She could sense the slowly fading pleasure of his orgasm, and his rude satisfaction at her disgust for the act.

...it loomed over him and prepared to draw him up to its hooded face, but hesitated, as if turned off by the easy prey presented to it...

He'd required nothing more complicated from her than fellatio the first few weeks and behaved as if he were doing her a favor in exchange for spells and a lesson in Occlumency for Harry. Harry never questioned further after she'd claimed to have read the exercises out of a book. She almost wished he would ask her so he'd know of the bitter semen she'd extracted and swallowed on his behalf. Not that she could tell him, of course.

"According to A. Verne Sepsus, Occlumency can be useful in defense and spell-casting, particularly in regards to duels. In addition, guarding and ordering one's mind is crucial preparation for any use of Dark magic." Harry's eyes were very clearly glazing over out of boredom. Without modulating her tone, she continued. "And has also been shown to cure erectile dysfunction, halitosis, and uncontrollable flatulence."

'How nice to be so celebrated as a scholar.'

Irritated at the unwelcome intrusion, she attempted to push the sneering presence from her mind. He only laughed at her efforts. *'Piss off. Don't you have something evil to do right now?'*

...it began to withdraw, repulsed by whatever remained of Snape's soul in the rabid thing straining against its fetters...

It was as if no woman had given him free reign to simply touch and experience her body without some immediate overriding directive. His hands were hesitant but rough as they poked and prodded, lessening in force with further practice as he could feel directly the results of each touch. He was quite happy with himself after he managed to bring her to orgasm.

...they forced it forward toward the meal it did not want, and it began pulling its hood back...

Her feet were wet, but not cold. The lukewarm water moved upwards now, crawling over her legs and waist before receding back to her toes. The rhythmic, soft roar was familiar, but she couldn't match it to the smooth stone on which she lay. She opened her eyes to see the darkening sky above her, the first stars winking into existence in the reaches of her field of vision. No, not quite the sky, as there seemed to be a chandelier placed next to the full moon right above her. The ceiling of the Great Hall then. She sat up, noticing she was lying between two of the tables just beneath the front dais with what appeared to be a meal interrupted spread about the Hall. A hand descended from above and behind her, passing along her throat gently before hovering in front of her in offer. Recognizing the pattern of scarring in the loose skin between thumb and forefinger, she took hold of the proffered hand and was pulled to her feet. Her sneakers squished in the rising water on the floor.

"This is a dream?" Judging by the food, they were in the middle of dinner abandoned. She turned to look toward the back of the Hall, and Snape took the opportunity to enfold her in a loose embrace from behind before answering.

"Yes, of mine, for a change. Well, one I've borrowed from Lupin, at least." She frowned at that and was about to ask how when he sighed.

"Yes, I had permission at the time. Lupin thought his memory had been tampered with, and Albus was... unavailable. This was at the front of his mind. A rather droll nightmare of his that I adapted to suit my purposes. The tide was blood, in his version, with the requisite bodies of people he feared harming while in wolfen form scattered among the dinner remains. Charming."

"It seems peaceful." The pattern of the tide was viscerally relaxing, she had to admit. Perhaps he found the setting comforting, as he'd lived in Hogwarts most his life, and it was certainly despite its trials certainly more of a home than where his uncle and mother dwelt...

"As long as you seem incapable of just standing here and enjoying this, shall we continue from where our discussion was interrupted?" He sounded primarily amused as he tucked her head into the hollow of his neck, pulling her to him more fully and resting his hands on her belly.

"You mean when you were trying to convince me that order doesn't exist?"

"Of course it does. It's merely inconsequential, a false -- if beautiful -- veneer over the true motions of whatever gods may be. There is such power in chaos. Even the Muggles recognize it, with their law of increasing entropy. Order is unnatural, the intricate balance that is life more so, but that deep power will abide its presence so long as it makes itself useful. The universe is nearly symmetric. The devil is in the 'nearly.'"

"What about mathematics?"

"The human mind looks for patterns, order. Its ability to derive such from its surroundings has convinced humankind of its importance in the workings of the world at large. Much like the celebrated perfection of the human form. Four limbs balanced, features aligned or mirrored, perhaps the basis for human perception. Cut beneath the skin, however, and the tidiness is disturbed."

...he screamed, a wordless, high piercing of her senses...

There was something, a tattoo or scar, patterned into the white skin of his back. In the dim light it seemed roughly circular, with smaller circles budding off at angle corresponding to his neck and shoulders, and down along the uneven ridges of his spine, and what looked like smaller coarse edges budding off of those, smaller and smaller forms crawling over his skin like splinters in rock. It reminded her of a diagram from one of her father's old math texts, only set on an uneven canvas. She began to trace the ragged lines starting at the lowest of the thoracic vertebrae. Her hand had traveled a few millimeters when she saw that the pattern was changing, collapsing in on itself while simultaneously forming anew from where her finger grazed his skin. She had never seen his naked back before, nor considered it odd that she had not done so. Thinking on it now, she recalled that even in dream-form, he'd undressed facing her. She'd originally thought his purpose was to make her uncomfortable; now, she thought perhaps he hadn't wanted her to see this. Puzzling. He'd shown her his other scars with aplomb, even relishing in her instinctual recoil. Her hand had reached the left scapula that she could practically pass a finger under, as he was so thin, before realizing he'd stopped breathing. The skin under her fingers was now etched in a triangle sprouting other smaller triangles along its edges, on which grew more, and others on those until she could no longer pick out individual shapes on Snape's back. It looked oddly like a fuzzy star, and recognition danced teasingly along the edges of her mind until Snape began to move beneath her, turning so she straddled his stomach. It was only as his eyes met hers, looking vulnerable for the first time in their association that she remembered.

"It's a Koch curve."

He grinned mirthlessly in response, yet took no further action, lying passively beneath her. It was almost as if after all he'd put her through, the discomfort, the humiliation, the murder, for Merlin's sake, he feared her, feared her response to him for the first time. When she touched his chest above his heart, she could feel his pulse at an elevated rate she'd only experienced before in his cock, alive and writhing beneath her hand. Said organ was currently lying flaccid behind her, his ever-present arousal in her company for once absent. Seemingly against his will, he answered the question she hadn't asked yet.

"A gift of my uncle's. His greatest triumph."

Out of curiosity she retraced the path her hand had taken the first time he'd sought release with her, watching him shiver, his muscles clench, a gasp torn from him as she reached the topmost of his prominent ribs, again to answer a query she'd barely formed in her mind.

"Yes. I would hardly go to such efforts to rid a child's crude drawing of fear from my body."

He was still capable of injecting sarcasm into his voice, though it was subdued by his shortness of breath.

"Does it hurt?" There. She had managed to actually pose a full question, possibly from passing her hand over his nearly concave abdomen, which had the effect of distracting him.

"All the time."

Using her hands placed on his hip bones for leverage, she slid herself back to sit astride his thighs. She had never initiated intercourse between them before and felt powerful as she stroked his sex to waking, his eyes locked on hers despite half-closing at the stimulation. This affection unbargained-for threw him, and his grip was almost skittish at her waist.

"And Dumbledore could have removed it?"

"He could have tried."

"Why?" She could tell he was close despite the brevity of their activities.

"I... you... Hermione." He came in a quick but powerful orgasm, and she stilled her movements. He lay tightly undone beneath her, the slightest hint of derision in her part poised to shatter him completely, a crippling weakness of his own design and implement. Instead, she brought his right hand between her legs, seeking her own pleasure from him for the first time in their twisted mess of a relationship.

...its lip-less mouth closed over his in a horrifying parody of a kiss...

In her mind, he was a disturbingly warming presence, a mocking worship, uneasy comfort as she argued with the adults of the Order. If she could not convince them of the Dark Lord's imminent offensive, she and the boys would be on their own. Her inability to cite her sources did not help her case at all.

...they were helping Harry pull her away now...

He entered her faster than she'd prepared herself for. As a sort of apology, he opened his mind, enabling her to feel the pleasure the joining had afforded him, but rather than act as a balm to the pain of the intrusion, the combination of the differing sensations was merely confusing. As he moved over her, it occurred to her that it was just as well he'd waited to initiate this aspect of their relationship until her body was, if not welcoming, accustomed to his touch, as this would have been excruciating otherwise with his proportions. Oddly enough, as cruel as he was verbally with her, he'd never purposefully inflicted physical pain. As she watched him and was reminded of the memory he'd shown her as a part of his proposition, she was struck with an epiphany that moved her heart to pity unbidden; the disgust she'd felt from the woman was not just typical, but the only response he'd ever elicited from either sex. The wives of Death Eaters that rutted with him once, perhaps twice before retreating to the relative safety of their husbands' beds, a delicious contrast to his alien attentions; the whores of Knockturn Alley that shuffled him amongst themselves, able to withstand mere ugliness of form or character but not his bone-deep unnaturalness; all resulted in shaping a sexual experience lacking simple, honest emotion. She felt the first stirrings of affection for this strange broken soul, and knew she was lost.

...his eyes hollowed but never left hers as his body slackened in its confines, and a name never granted to him by her in life tore from her in his effectual passing...

"Severus?"

"Tom?"

His answer was a deceptively calm taunt, stilling the Dark Lord's hand for a crucial moment as he lunged at the great wizard. He ducked under Voldemort's wand arm, a curse grazing his back, which rippled unnaturally in response. In an act nearly impossible for ordinary teeth, and especially the dull, crooked set she knew he possessed, he tore into the unprotected throat of the Dark Lord, ripping through muscle and cartilage with a joy Fenrir would have admired, were he still among the living. Voldemort staggered, not quite human enough to be felled by the blow, clutching at his ruined larynx with one hand and casting another curse at Snape silently as he rolled away that engulfed the traitor in flames. She looked to the Boy Who Lived, frozen in dueling stance in response to the unexpected carnage, and managed through the pain exploding in her chest to scream.

"Harry, now!"

Harry snapped out of distraction at her words, roaring at Voldemort and casting the spell that had been years in coming.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!"

The sickly green light enveloped Voldemort even as he realized his error, catching him in mid-turn, and he fell twisted to the ground. And did not rise. In spite of all his ambitions, his scheming and dreams that made nightmares for others, the Dark Lord lay as a merely ordinary, albeit ugly, wizard. No explosions accompanied his passing, nor did ghostly mist rise from him shrieking in agony, or any other such phenomena that would mark his death as extraordinary. Hermione found this fitting as she stared at the still features spattered in dark blood with the curse the bastard had leveled at her chewing away at her insides. Harry seemed to be in shock, standing over his fallen opponent unseeing.

A noise nearby drew her attention from the corpse. Snape was laughing quietly as he spat out blood and offal, a sound eerie in its normalcy amid the violent silence that'd fallen on the field and its combatants. His skin pulsed where the tattoo had spread, his thin chest visible beneath his burning robes covered in red and black sigils. He brushed the fire from himself as he rose and stalked toward her, pulling a long, thin knife from a hidden sheath. He captured and held her eyes as he reached her, clasping her shoulder with his other hand before plunging the knife underneath her left breast, rupturing the ballooning object that would have surely killed her moments later. This was not what Harry saw, however, only that Snape had stabbed his best friend in their nascent triumph over evil, and reacted accordingly.

"Sectumsempra!"

His skin split as he toppled forward onto her, and in her weakened state she was unable to stem their combined descent to the already bloodstained ground beneath them. He grasped for his wand even as they fell, but it slipped through crimson-slicked fingers. His weight atop her forced air from lungs already lacking it, and she found herself immobile beneath him. His bloody shoulder lay directly in front of her face, and she saw pieces of a Mandlebrot set attempting to reconnect around the red slashes.

"Idiot boy."

The familiar appellation was barely intelligible through his cough, a wet ugly gasping that had her scrambling for her wand from where it had fallen next to her when she

could finally move. She began healing the worst of the damage, recasting 'Episkey' for each gash she found, and tried to push him off of her to reach the rest of the injuries. Aurors reached them first and pulled Snape away from her in a cacophony of orders and spells. She reached for him in panic, but her outstretched arms connected with Harry instead as he hurled himself into her embrace, muttering something about Ron and drenching the neck of her robes in tears. Time slowed, then leapt past her in turns as the remnants of the battle dissipated around her.

She could still feel Snape and used the link to Apparate to him in desperation, with Harry crushing her to himself, carried along for the ride. He staggered away from her when they materialized in a room next to a cage that could have generously been called a prison cell. Snape was chained to the wall in front of her, Aurors hurling threats and curses at him next to her from behind the safety of the iron bars. She surged forward toward the barrier...

Harry had brought her back here; the Healers had released her, but forbade her participation in the cleanup efforts, citing mental and physical health risks. She hadn't gone to bed as he'd pleaded. Instead, she wandered past furniture shabby with age to a tall mirror embellished with the crest of the Noble House of Black beneath the high windows of the room. She could see her reflection dull beneath the film coating the metal and glass. The blood on her cloak patterned black against red.

They would bury Ron tomorrow. Harry had promised.

The back of her head felt swathed in cotton, tendrils creeping forward over folds and crevices, seeping around fibers and under sheaths. She felt a warm deadness around -- in -- her right shoulder, sliding down slowly to encircle her wrist, stretching each of her fingers out against the soft fabric of her blouse. It took her other hand over her hip and down, catching her thumb in the light crease between thigh and mons pubis before curling it inward to cup her sex through her robes. She drew her gaze back up to the mirror and saw black cloth wrapping around her body, a dark head coming forward over her shoulder.

She knew with this being walking behind her eyes, wandering through her thoughts and dreams, pressing her into the corners of her skull, that she would never be alone again.

She trembled, and the presence answered with a deep, rich chuckle.

In fine.

Women are like that, they don't acquire knowledge of people we are. For that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often, and usually right, they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing in slumber, fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no...

AN: I am much indebted to Vaughn (thanks again!) for the wonderful beta job and the impetus to finally get this fic off my hard-drive, where it's been sitting for over a year. All characters belong to J.K. Rowling, and the quote above is lovingly borrowed (along with inspiration for the story format) from *The Sound and the Fury*. I hope you've enjoyed this dark little ficlet, and would greatly appreciate any feedback you'd be willing to give. Thanks for reading.

PS. Three hundred points to anyone who spots the quote from The Who's Quadrophenia. It's a scant two words long. Good luck.