

Serpensortia

by Olethros

Green Eyes, Dark Man, and Medusa interrogate a most unlikely ally. DH-compliant(ish) but EWE.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Um, so this story kind of took off in its own direction, so I probably didn't answer the prompt exactly. But I hope it's as fun for you as it was for me.

Eternal thanks goes to sshg316, my lovely beta who managed to turn this around in less than 24 hours so that I could make the deadline.

Summary: Green Eyes, Dark Man, and Medusa interrogate a most unlikely ally. DH-compliant(ish) but EWE.

Serpensortia

It was much too cold.

Not for the humans, of course. They sighed in veritable bliss when they stepped into my basement room. From what I could comprehend of their body language, it was a particularly scorching August in England, and the chilly basement served as an excellent reprieve from the heat.

For me, the cold in the basement felt as if one of my former caretakers had injected me with every tranquilizer in existence. It seemed an apt metaphor, as my life had once again become an existence as a lab specimen and a pretty popular one at that.

It was always the same pack; they came to gawk and were careful to stand outside the white chalk line. I would look down at them from my perch. When I was particularly bored, I would smile. On those days, they stood further away. As if I could have dreamed of touching them from my position!

Two of the people returned regularly. Green Eyes was there almost every day. He could talk to me, and he kept me from going mad. Do you know what humans who can't speak Parseltongue sound like? Like squeaking mice, although a few octaves lower than actual rodents. The constant squealing noises of prey was an incessant reminder of how I hadn't had anything to eat since...

"I'm sorry about this," Green Eyes had said on more than one occasion. And he actually sounded sorry. I suspected it was because I could no longer attempt to kill him. "But *he* insists that you're not getting anything until he has a word with you. Beats me as to how he's going to do it, as he refuses to go through me. You'd think that coming back from the dead would have made him a little less bitter over stupid grudges but no..."

The *he* in question was the other constant presence in my basement room, and he was a familiar one. I always liked it when Tom had spoken his name over the many years that he and Dark Man had been acquaintances. The pretty name had been replete with nearly as many hissing sounds as genuine Parseltongue.

Dark Man sat in a chair in a dark corner of the room, just far enough away that I would have forgotten that he was there were it not for the regular waves of hatred that

emanated from his body.

Although I do not understand the tongue of humans, their emotions have always been easily read. What kind of hunter was I if I could not sense the delicious scent of fear? Dark Man exuded almost constant anger that was nearly successful at masking his fear.

Honestly, both Green Eyes and Dark Man should have been grateful to simply be alive. Failing to maim and kill, respectively, two victims in a row had been an embarrassing blunder on my part.

Especially as it meant that I had become an unwitting agony aunt in my afterlife. Green Eyes, whom Tom had attempted to kill on countless occasions, seemed to have an insatiable need to tell me all his troubles. I never offered any type of response, but that hardly discouraged him.

"My friends don't understand," Green Eyes pouted. I would never have believed that someone could make the language of snakes sound *whiny*. "They tell me it's been six months since Voldemort's death. That the dead have been buried and mourned, and the living have gone on living. Well, most of them that is." At this Green Eyes glanced over at Dark Man in the corner, who glared back suspiciously. "They don't understand what it's like to be bred from birth to be a Dark Lord-killing machine. And now that he's gone, it's like there's no purpose for my existence any longer. Ginny's been great, of course, but she can never fully understand."

In fact, I understood better than he would have thought. I might have been tempted to respond had my sluggish, half-frozen brain not been preoccupied by the reminder that it had been six months since Tom's death. As I had not been allowed to eat Batty Grandmother or Dark Man, that meant it had been longer than that since I had last dined. Even though I no longer had a stomach, I was ravenous.

"Why won't you talk to me?" Green Eyes asked one day. I craned what was left of my neck to look down at him. Unable to sneer like Dark Man, I settled for sticking my tongue out at him. Multiple times. "They'll figure out a way to communicate with you eventually, and do you really want to go through all this again? Hermione reckons she's nearly got it, and you know how she gets when there's a challenge."

I did not know the person of whom he spoke, but I could not help my curiosity. *Communicate with me?* I had no desire to speak with anyone, but the thought that the humans would no longer sound like testosterone-injected rodents was a pleasant one indeed.

"What do you want me to say?"

The words left my throat faster and louder than I had anticipated. I no longer had lungs to limit the amount of air I could inhale.

Both Green Eyes and Dark Man visibly jumped at the sound of my voice. Dark Man seemed to have a hard time controlling his trembling. To him, my words must have sounded like nothing more than vicious hissing and spitting. I smirked. *Bad memories?*

"What do you want me to say?" I repeated. "As you said, Green Eyes, Tom is dead. Get on with your existence. Eat. Recover. Reproduce."

Green Eyes' face turned a funny shade of red at the mention of reproduction, and I nearly salivated from the scent of all that blood rushing to his head.

Dark Man was hurling angry squeaks at Green Eyes, gesturing up at me repeatedly. Green Eyes shook his head and turned back to me.

"Snape wants to know if you have anything useful to say. We want to know about the Death Eaters. Their names, their current whereabouts, and whatever else you might know. Most of the Death Eaters were rounded up in the Battle of Hogwarts, but there remain some unaccounted for. We also never knew how many of them there actually were. That's why I brought you back."

Green Eyes held up something in his hand, a small black stone with a jagged crack running down the center. A quick glance confirmed that it was not food.

"Sssnape?" I said.

"Severus Snape," Green Eyes answered.

"Severussssss Sssssssnape," I said, my tongue lingering joyfully on every sibilant spirant. "That is Dark Man's name? Beautiful." I looked over at him in the corner, leering as provocatively as I could with my thin, vertical pupils. Severus shifted uncomfortably.

Regretfully, Green Eyes' voice demanded my attention again. "You... you mean to say that you didn't know Snape's name? Do you know any of the Death Eaters' names?" he asked, emitting a sudden jolt of anxiety that tantalized my pit organ.

"You mean Tom's pack? He had little reason to speak of them to me unless he was telling me which one to eat for dinner."

I watched in dismay as the blood drained from his face in disappointment, leaving unappetizing pale skin behind. Rats.

Oh, I shouldn't have thought that. Juicy, delicious rats...

My happy visions of wriggling rodents were interrupted by Green Eyes' puzzled query. "You call him Tom?"

"I gave a piece of him free rent in my head for years; I decided that I was entitled to his given name. Did you call him 'Voldemort'? I can't believe he actually used that..."

"Used what?"

"He became attracted to one of the local humans when we were in Paris. He walked around with a dictionary for the next week. By the end, he not only understood the female's rejection of his dinner invitation, but he had also pieced together a silly new name for himself."

"Ho-how long ago was this?"

"Tom was twelve, I believe."

"Just how old are you?"

"Older than you, you impertinent plonker."

Green Eyes' green eyes went wide. Then he burst out laughing. Severus and I looked at him incredulously. His laughter was genuine, and his glee had made me a little dizzy.

"Snape," he gasped. "I think you can be confident that Voldemort is not living in her anymore." Severus glared. Green Eyes rolled his eyes and squeaked at him, presumably repeating what he had just said in the human tongue.

Severus' gaze darted over to me, and a little of the tension seemed to leave his body.

"Severussssss Sssssnape," I hissed happily. As I lacked eyelids to bat, I dilated and constricted my pupils at him. Severus turned an unappetizing shade of green.

Suddenly the door to my room burst open, and a human female dashed into the room, breathing hard. I had seen her once before; she was one of the many faces in the crowd gathered in front of the large castle right before I was unhappily decapitated.

I remembered the bushy, flyaway fur that resembled a dozen of my brethren nesting atop her head.

I saw a stricken look cross Severus' face when Medusa entered the room. He was standing right in front of me, and I caught the full brunt of a wave of emotion that left me nauseous. The feeling was comparable to the time I had swallowed a man weighing twenty-two stone.

"Do you mind?" I hissed, still reeling, before I remembered that he couldn't understand me.

Medusa looked up at me, having heard me speak. Her scent floated across my face, and I sniffed. Confusion reigned in my mind.

Severus and Medusa... they had the same scent. I could not imagine a less likely couple to be kindred.

Medusa was squeaking excitedly and gesticulating for Severus and Green Eyes to come closer. She, too, held up something in her hand that was small and black and not food. Severus was scowling at her and pointing to the black thing and then to me. I was surprised when Medusa glared back at him with vicious exasperation that seemed out of place among blood kin.

Then she stepped around both men and walked right up to my face. Her hand, holding the black object, reached towards the side of my head. I didn't see it; my eyes were riveted upon her exposed throat, pulsing with life.

Food!

My reflexes were dulled from the cold and from many years of not hunting my own prey. But my head still snapped forward faster than she could draw breath to scream. My venom glands had not been damaged by my beheading. I could feel the poison shooting across the roof of my jaw, straining to escape the tips of my pointed fangs...

An almighty *bang* nearly deafened me, and I suddenly found myself writhing in acrid, white smoke. Venom leaked from my fangs as I hissed in agony, and not only from the rancid smoke. My head pounded from squeaking sounds that quickly reached fever pitch.

My vision cleared enough to reveal the sounds to be coming from Severus, but he wasn't even looking at me. His wand was pointed at Medusa, who was in a heap next to the wall. She rubbed her head, obviously in pain from when his wand had flung her to the side.

Green Eyes was frozen in shock, his mouth open and his wand only half-drawn. If neither of them had hexed me, then where had all the smoke come from? And what was that infernal itch in my left pit organ?

"...hell you were thinking, you stupid girl! You could have been killed! Did you really think that the Dark Lord's pet would not hesitate to seek revenge?"

"Not revenge," I mumbled. "Food... hungry."

Two pairs of eyes, black and green, widened in disbelief. Medusa looked smug.

Severus recovered first. He cleared his throat. "You can understand me?"

I looked at him down my non-existent nose. "Obviously," I hissed in the most sarcastic tone I could manage. Severus appeared oddly resentful.

Medusa got to her feet. "My grandmother wears hearing aids. I took one and experimented with it a bit."

Severus' eyes looked as if they would bug out of his head. "Just a *bit*? To charm a Muggle hearing aid to translate English to Parseltongue and back? This... this *certainly* falls under the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts, Miss Granger."

Medusa ignored him and turned to me. "Um, hi," she said hesitantly. "I'm Hermione Granger. The fellow who can speak Parseltongue is Harry Potter. And the grouch is Severus Snape."

"Severussssss and I are well acquainted," I replied. Severus scowled in my direction. "I do not know you, Hermione. As for Harry, Tom once promised you as a meal. I can't imagine why; you're a scrawny thing." Green Eyes matched Severus' scowl. "I am Nagini. And I refuse to say a single thing more until I get something to eat."

"You dare ask for a favor? Even after you've now tried to kill all three of us?" Severus seethed.

"How can you blame me? I haven't eaten in over *a year*." Whining in Parseltongue was much easier than I could have believed.

"Forgive me for my utter lack of sympathy," Severus replied at the same time that Hermione gasped and cried, "A year? Oh you poor thing!"

Severus and Harry both looked at her as though she had sprouted an extra head.

"My last meal was that teacher woman last July. Her nail polish tasted rancid."

"Er... that must have been horrible," Hermione stammered.

"Snakes of Nagini's size can survive at least sixteen months between meals," Severus retorted.

"But that woman was *tiny*."

"I think I'm going to be sick," Hermione muttered.

"Why should we feed you?" Harry said, looking at me suspiciously. "You already admitted that you don't know any of the Death Eaters' names. That means you are of no use to us."

If I could have rolled my eyes, I would have. It was a human gesture I had always been jealous of, closely followed by the ability to blink. "You humans and your obsession with names! Indiscriminate, meaningless things. I do not know names. I know scents; I know faces; I know emotions."

Oddly, Hermione and Severus suddenly looked nervous. Harry still looked doubtful. "You would betray your former Master so readily?"

"I am a snake, not a human. I serve the one who feeds me, whoever that may be. And if you cast a warming spell my way as well, I'll tell you everything you might possibly want to know."

A brief silence. Then Harry said, "Very well. Honestly, after Pettigrew, I wouldn't mind seeing you swallow a *few rats*."

"I'll, um, be back in about an hour," Hermione said. She turned and walked out of the room, somewhat unsteady.

"I like the black, dancing ones the best!" I called out to Harry as he also turned to leave.

I looked down at Severus. He had stayed right where he was, and I noticed that we were quite alone.

"Is it 'revenge' you seek upon me, Severus?" I asked suddenly.

His eyes moved over me lazily, his face impassive.

"As long as we are speaking in human terms, I might remind you that the 'betrayal' came first from your side."

"I desire nothing of the sort," Severus drawled. "I am not the sort to exact revenge upon a cripple."

Severus openly smirked as I bared my fangs, all his emissions of discomfort now gone. "Would you like to see how well we have cared for you since your resurrection?"

With his wand, he conjured a mirror, which he raised to my eye level.

I was a shrunken, dead-looking thing. My scaly skin, formerly a handsome steel gray, had faded to the color of soap scum. Both of my eyes were severely bloodshot. But the real masterpiece was the thing holding me up on the wall. All that remained of me was my head and a few inches of neck, all of which was mounted bulls-eye center on a regulation 18-inch red, black, and green dartboard

I looked steadily at myself and then raised my gaze to Severus. His face was carefully neutral, waiting for my reaction, waiting for what he was sure would be...

I smirked, a gesture that showed all my teeth. "If this was a pub, it'd be warmer, you wanker."

He stiffened for a moment. And then it was as if an outer layer of him had cracked and crumbled into pieces. His face no longer appeared so haggard, and his eyes gleamed a bit more brightly.

I'm no great expert when it comes to the human psyche, but I can always sense fear. And in all the time that I had known him, all twenty long years, Severus had been afraid. The fear had simmered constantly within him, and it had motivated his greatest feats as often as it had crippled him. I remembered with perfect clarity when I had sunk my teeth into his neck. I had slithered away, my jaws dripping with his heart's blood, and nearly stopped dead at the waves of fear rolling off his body. It had not been fear of death no, he had welcomed Death with meek resignation it had been fear that he would fail in his task, that he might never fulfill the purpose of his existence.

It was no surprise to me, therefore, that he had to prove himself unafraid of the thing that had nearly robbed his life of all meaning. And mounting that thing's head on a dartboard made it rather difficult to fear her, did it not? It was a cheap trick, but I found that I could not feel irritated at him. From what I recalled, the poor sod had been dealt a rather awful lot in life.

"Not so frightening anymore, am I?" I saw him look surprised, then a little guilty, and I knew that my interpretation had been correct.

"How could someone like you serve Voldemort for so long?" he suddenly asked.

"He fed me."

"That's it? What of his invasions into your mind? His unpredictable tempers? His desire to warp the world to his liking and to slaughter anything that stood in his path? How could you live with *that* for so much of your life?"

I sensed that he wasn't talking about me anymore. "Don't overcomplicate things, Severus. Tom fed me and provided for my well-being. And he was a world better than my former caretaker, who had a nasty habit of injecting me with chemicals for his experiments. I'm a snake... crawling on my belly and eating dust all the days of my life and all that rot. It's just my nature to be a selfish creature."

I paused, looking at him. He was turning his Conjured mirror over and over in his hands, staring off into some unknown distance. He was also emitting the most confusing potpourri of emotions.

I hazarded a guess. "But that's not your nature, is it? You're a bully and a lout with more than a few species of insect living in that black fur of yours, but you've never been a selfish creature."

The mirror shattered on the basement floor. Severus' eyes were like flash-heated coals as he cleaned up the mess with a sweep of his wand. "Rather presumptuous for a half-dead reptile, aren't you?" he said, his voice low.

I eyed him lazily. "What will you do? Kill me again?"

"Don't tempt me further."

"If you had wanted to kill me, you would have done so when I attacked your mate."

Severus appeared to be choking on something. "*What?*" he hissed.

"That female with the nest of serpents for fur."

"Ridiculous. Not...she's not..." I was amazed at how a man who had been able to face his own death and come away unafraid could be discomfited by such an innocent statement.

"Er... forget I said anything." For my inner ear heard a slight intake of breath from a female person eavesdropping on the other side of the door. That someone had been there ever since they had stepped outside.

The door opened suddenly and Harry walked in, carrying a wriggling sack in his hands. My eyes, attuned to the smallest of movements did not fail to notice the brief glimpse of bushy fur behind him that just as quickly disappeared.

Half an hour later, I tossed back my sixth rodent wood rats, not nearly as tasty as the black ones, but at least they didn't stink like their sewer brethren. Between mouthfuls, I told Harry that there had been a Death Eater that constantly smelled of sewer rat.

"Pettigrew," the boy muttered. "Small, squat chap. Pointed nose; he had his right hand replaced with a silver limb."

"A truly pretentious thing. Yes, that was him. Even I didn't feel like eating that creature." I yawned in contentment, showing every single one of my fangs.

The boy seemed to be staring at me in morbid fascination. "Er... you don't really have a stomach anymore. How exactly are you *eating*?"

"Well..." I licked a last bit of rat relish from my back fangs. "You might say that it's all in my *head*."

Severus' voice cut in through my sudden bout of sniggering. "I think I preferred it when I didn't understand you."

I was in a sickeningly cheery mood after a few rats and a few degrees of warmth. "Don't be unkind, Severus. Severussss. Did I mention you have a lovely name? No hard feelings, eh?"

Severus scowled. Honestly, did he have any other facial expressions? At least I had the excuse that I didn't have the facial muscles to express anything.

Barely a second later, the girl Hermione, I reminded myself slid inside. She nodded slightly at Severus, who suddenly attempted to blend into the wall.

Harry cleared his throat. "So let's get down to business then. I'll show you pictures of all the Death Eaters we have killed or have in custody, and you tell us of any that we're missing."

He showed me image after image of familiar faces. I noticed how Severus appeared to be as fascinated by the steady procession of images as I. I snickered at the wild mass masquerading as fur in the image of the one they called Bellatrix. She had never been right in the head since her fifteen-year stint in Azkaban, bereft of all hair products. I suspected her blonde sister had never stopped teasing her about it.

"That's all we have accounted for," Harry said after a few dozen images. "What others do you know of?"

"Well, there was the short and stumpy Tweedledee and Tweedledum..."

"The Carrows," Severus muttered. "Somehow they escaped from Ravenclaw Tower."

"That man-beast with multiple-personality disorder..."

"Greyback."

"The three blond stooges..."

"That's hardly kind. And they have since been pardoned."

"And that fellow missing an eye and a leg."

Sudden silence.

"What?" All three humans both asked at the same time.

"Old. Grouchy. Not the most attractive chap. I think Tom was going to let me eat him eventually but got himself killed before getting around to it."

Hermione looked at Harry.

"But he's dead," she said at the same time that Harry shook his head and said, "I never saw Moody when I was in the dungeon at Malfoy Manor."

"The place with those delicious white peacocks? Oh, he wasn't there. Tom found the cripple lying half-dead in a field and locked him up in that dodgy building with the graveyard out front. I think he was amused that he had found someone nearly as stubborn a survivor as himself."

Severus snorted. "Preposterous, I never heard a thing about Voldemort keeping Moody prisoner. And even if it were true, the old man would be long dead."

I couldn't help sneering. "What makes you think Tom told you everything? If he did, there would have been no purpose in bringing me back from the dead." Severus twitched involuntarily, and I saw Hermione place an unobtrusive hand on his forearm. If Severus noticed, he did not acknowledge the gesture. "And as for the old man being dead, he was alive the day that Tom left for battle at your castle. So it's only been six months."

"Unfortunately, unlike your species, we lowly humans die after mere weeks without food," Severus retorted.

Hermione looked thoughtful. "Professor Snape, have you ever heard of a wizard dying of starvation? It hardly ever happens since replication and multiplication spells are not that difficult. Granted, I can't imagine food tasting too good after it's been copied a dozen times."

"Insufferable know-it-all," Severus muttered so quietly that only I could hear.

"It's worth a shot," Harry interjected softly. "And I would never forgive myself if we didn't make sure."

My species is free of the obsessive human need to keep track of time, so I couldn't have told you how long the three of them were gone except that the light from the sun faded in and out several times. My phantom stomach was full. I occupied myself with watching the steady journey of a spider crawling up the opposite wall. The small black creature leapt from corner to corner, spinning a gossamer web. Several days later, the finished structure was a beautiful deathtrap.

A large fly buzzed around several lengths of the room before sealing his fate by flying into the sticky strings. The spider's mandibles twitched in hungered excitement as it scrambled towards the struggling insect, eight legs flying...

The basement door opened with a bang, sending a tremor through the walls. The web shuddered, and the fly shook free, escaping death.

Severus snarled at the insect hovering before his face and swatted it away in annoyance. Then I felt his emotions shift like a tidal wave as he turned the full force of his ire upon Hermione. "Do you have a death wish, Miss Granger?"

"I *apologize* if I didn't think the emaciated old cripple to be dangerous."

"You obviously underestimated how much Moody hated me," Severus retorted.

I smelled blood and noticed the large white bandage covering the entire left side of her neck.

"The old cripple was alive then?" I inquired, attempting to ignore the cloying scent of fresh blood.

Severus sniffed. "Surprisingly, yes. I was amazed that a man could survive eating the same piece of bread for over six months."

"Honestly I think he was more mental over that than anything to do with you," Hermione muttered.

"Will you two just *shut up*?" Harry snapped, making his voice heard for the first time. "You've been at it like an old married couple for hours, and that is a thought too scary for my sanity."

Severus rounded on him. "If you had done your duty as an Auror and kept your wand on Moody, Miss Granger would not have been seized with the idiotic notion to volunteer herself for target practice, and I would not now be offending your sensibilities."

In the brief respite of silence as Harry attempted to perform Snape-English translation, Hermione turned to me. "Thank you," she said. "We were able to get Moody out of Riddle's house, and St Mungo's thinks that he'll make a full recovery."

"Though he's even battier than he was before."

Harry snorted. "After what he's been through, I think he was well-justified in Apparating to Antarctica and making himself Unplottable."

I looked from one human to another, trying to puzzle out the changed dynamics flowing between them. Until their recent rescue mission, the three had interacted with each other as if they were slithering through nettles grudgingly and only when necessary. And now, although I couldn't call their aura to be one of kinship... well, I doubt that Harry had ever dared to tell Severus to "shut up" before.

"So what are we going to do with her?"

Three pairs of eyes—two human, one reptilian—turned to Severus as he asked the unexpected question.

"Only a few select members of the Order know that Potter brought Nagini back," Severus pointed out. "But you can't expect it to stay that way. Once word gets out... Shacklebolt will have a firestorm on his hands. After all, she did kill more people than Voldemort."

Normally, I would have made a snide comment about Tom being too lazy to clean up his own messes, but the waves of awkwardness directed at me from all three humans made me uneasy.

"Do you know of any more Death Eaters unaccounted for?" Harry asked.

I looked at Severus as I replied, "You know I don't."

"Still," Harry continued. "I don't see why anybody has to know. We can keep her in here..."

"Except that I would rather starve to death than spend the rest of my half-life in this underground hole," I snapped.

"I'm sorry that my home offends you so," Severus drawled. "But I rarely have guests."

"You resurrected me, Green Eyes. You can send me back."

Harry looked stunned. "You *want* to go back to being dead?"

"Not particularly. But I get a feeling that many others want me that way, and my survival instinct doesn't like those odds. Especially from my current position."

"There must be a way," Severus said. "They managed to accept *me*."

I made a sound halfway between a hiss and a human chuckle. "You've forgotten, Severus. You're one of the good guys."

Severus scowled and was silent.

"Send me back," I said calmly. "I've been all the help I can be. Unless there's someone you want me to eat."

Harry opened his mouth, then closed it. He finally settled for shaking his head and stepping out.

Severus fidgeted for a moment. "Miss Granger?" he asked the back of Hermione's head. She shook her head and never took her eyes off me.

"I need to take the implant out. Before... well, before."

"Right," he said. He paused. "Well, I'll be upstairs and will see you out."

After he left, Hermione continued looking at me quizzically, her face scrunched slightly in irritation.

"Don't tell me you're like the house-elves and think that you're destined to be a certain way," she blurted out. "I heard what you said to Professor Snape earlier. Survival instinct, my arse. You're not evil, and you're not just an animal."

I cocked my head to the side. It hurt slightly as one side of my neck drew taut from where it was fixed to the dartboard.

"I tried to kill you," I said simply.

"I've forgiven people for worse."

I sighed. "You are, if you'll forgive me for saying so, a *very* unique specimen of your species. I appreciate it, I really do; but can you really imagine living alone forever in this cell? I'd die of boredom."

She sniffed. "It's your choice, I suppose. I just wish..."

She said it with such earnestness that I wondered how many more hopeless cases she would take on in the future. She raised her hand towards my head to remove the implant. One last mystery niggled at my mind. Might as well find out before...

"May I now ask you a question, Hermione?"

"Sure, I guess."

"Are you and Severus Snape bound together?"

An unappetizing paling of the skin. "N-no, why would you say that?"

"You share the same blood."

"Oh, that." Some of the color returned to her face, although she still emitted waves of discomfort. "Do you remember when you, er, were ordered to kill Snape?"

"Of course. It was one of my more puzzling failures. I have never failed to kill a victim when ordered."

"Well, none of your previous victims had a Muggleborn close at hand who was able to Apparate both of them to a Muggle clinic that knew about cardiopulmonary resuscitation and blood transfusion. Nor did the person who brought him there also happen to have the same blood type as him. It would have been no use otherwise; he was O negative and couldn't have accepted any other blood type. And he had lost so much of it..."

Half of what she said made no sense to me. Still... "You are a Mudblood?" I inquired.

She frowned for a moment before apparently realizing that there had been no derision in my tone. "Yes," she said, chin raised.

Did Severus know that he owed his life to and shared blood with a Mudblood? Was that why I felt his nausea every time he looked at her? But no, it didn't seem *likbat* kind of discomfort.

My pupils dilated as I looked at her more carefully. "There is more to you than meets the eye, Hermione."

She inclined her head. "Likewise." She reached up for the implant in my head, leaning close. I caught a whiff of crisp parchment and dew-soaked flowers and something else that left me breathless and light-headed. That something made me feel as if there was nothing in the world that couldn't be done. I decided it wasn't bad for the last sensation I would ever have.

She paused an inch from my head. She wavered for a moment and then dropped her hand.

"I have a better idea," she said.

The Three Broomsticks was always incredibly lively on Friday evenings. Sometimes when things got out of hand, Rosmerta that blessed woman would find herself explaining to a sloshed wizard that no, it wasn't *that* kind of dartboard. Protecting me was the least she could do. Business had never been better for her establishment since I had been installed above the bar as the main attraction.

The expected backlash from the humans over my survival never came. I suspected they believed it just desserts for me to be turned into a gawker's spectacle.

But really... how could I complain about life in a warm, cozy room with humans constantly looking up to me?

This particular Friday evening, the pub was filled to bursting. It wasn't every day that the heroes of the wizarding world all gathered to celebrate the birthday of one of their own.

The birthday girl in question was sitting happily in the midst of the mob, having drunk just enough that her eyes seemed unnaturally bright.

I looked to the boy sitting to her right. "Sir Neville," I said. "I trust that you will ensure that Hermione does not take leave of her senses?"

Sir Neville flushed nervously; he did every time I addressed him so. But nature dictated that I show respect to the one who had bested me. And he couldn't conceal from me how happy he truly felt about the honorific.

Sitting to her left, Harry laughed; it was a light-hearted, carefree sound. "This is Hermione's night. She can do whatever the hell she wants!"

The girl's eyes snapped up. "Really?"

"Of course. You deserve it," Harry's red-haired mate said. She grinned at Hermione. There was something very suspicious about that smile.

Hermione beamed. Then, in front of several dozen Order members and well-wishers, she called, "Severus?"

Harry choked on his Firewhisky. Sir Neville looked terrified. The red-haired girl smirked. Severus, who had been doing a passable job of blending into the wall, stood suddenly as if someone had skewered him with a red-hot poker. He knocked over his table with a great crash that echoed loudly in the deathly-silent pub.

Hermione smiled sweetly. "It's getting late. Could I trouble you to walk me home?"

Severus' mouth opened and closed in a fair imitation of a goldfish. His eyes darted around the room in panic as every single human turned to him, blasting varying degrees of disbelief and disgust in his direction.

Humans! Once again, I wished for the ability to roll my eyes. "She's chosen you, you prat. You'd better mate with her before these others decide to make a challenge."

Oddly enough, my comment did not seem to diffuse the situation. In the commotion that resulted, more than a dozen bottles were smashed, several people were Transfigured into chickens, and Severus and Hermione disappeared.

Forcing myself not to drool at the sight of the chickens, I saw Harry slump into his chair, looking utterly confused.

Time for some more damage control.

"Rosmerta! A few more rounds of your house best over here!"

Finite Incantatem

A/N: Where did Ron disappear to? To the land of Creative License so that he would be out of the way for More Important Developments. Also courtesy of that land is the acknowledgment that snakes are colorblind, but I think we can all agree that Nagini was a very unique creature and therefore had no trouble telling that Harry had green eyes.

A/N 2: I'd also like to take this moment to champion my other fic *Memento Amori*. If you enjoyed this fic, please go give that a read; it's my baby and only seven chapters away from being complete.

Original prompt: After the final battle, Non Horcrux Nagini is questioned by Harry (and the Aurors?) about the strange goings on in the Death Eater rooms (I guess this could be whatever. . .secret meetings, spies, betrayal, oh my goodness I'm going to die let's have sex, etc.)