

Cold Comfort

by Keppiehed

Is one night enough to say goodbye to the boy who held his heart? Or will it break all over again? Snape finds out the high cost of his pride, but maybe he has one last chance to make things right.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Warnings: Please be aware that in addition to all of the extra warnings, this story deals with the subject of necrophilia.

Author's Notes: All of this belongs to J.K. Rowling (not that she will claim this one, LOL). Written for hp_kinkfest and themostepotente. I only hope I did it justice. Also, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my outstanding beta and friend, Literaryspell. She did so much work on this that she deserves a co-author credit, bless her poor heart. Any mistakes left are mine to claim.

May my quivering lips taste the coolness of yours as the warmth of my eternal love enters you and stays with you forever. -Unknown

The bell jangled over the door in Severus' little shop, alerting him that a customer had entered. He sighed. Though it was necessary, it was still an evil. This was part of the job that he had to put up with in order to enjoy the solitude in which he was mostly allowed to dwell.

After the war, after the smoke had cleared, the dead had been sorted and a tally had been made of the living; his name had been cleared. He had received a full pardon and a measly pension. Being a war hero was not as profitable as one might think. It was surprising how little it was really worth when the Galleons were actually on the table.

Severus was recognized for the role he had played in the destruction of the Dark Lord, but it seemed that he still made people uneasy. They didn't want him around their children anymore, pardon or not. That suited him just fine. With Dumbledore cold in his grave, there had been nothing to tie him to that place. It held not a shred of appeal for him. He was free to do as he would now. His life, for what little it was worth, was finally his own. He'd left Hogwarts behind, the years of regrets clinging like dust on his boots. It turned out the ashes of the past held on more tenaciously than he cared to admit, even to himself.

Severus had taken his small stipend and started a potions store. It wasn't his dream, but it allowed him his small freedoms. He traveled and collected ingredients, leaving others alone and being left alone in kind. He spent hours at his bench testing new combinations. That was what gave him the most satisfaction: the research and the reading, the time in pursuit of his art.

Severus would have preferred solitude, but reality always seemed to spoil every dream. There was no money in his hobby, and to make ends meet, he was forced to open

his shop during daylight hours to be little more than a glorified apothecary. He kept his head down and sold his concoctions, but it was begrudgingly. He didn't want to be a shopkeep. He wanted to be a Potions master, nothing more, nothing less.

Severus sold a few remedies to the remaining customers in his shop and glanced irritably out the one grimy window to gauge the passing of the day. Surely it was time to close? The days felt longer with each passing week. Severus dreamed of a time when he didn't have to hang a shingle outside his door, when he could merely bar his door to all and sundry and stay away from the world and everyone in it.

He kept his face carefully averted as the last of the customers came up to the counter with his wares. He tallied it all up with a sharp glance and bit out the total. "Four Knuts and a Sickle."

The man paid silently.

As he wrapped up the purchases, Severus couldn't help but take an interest. These were old and varied ingredients. He felt compelled to offer a word of advice. "Take much care with the belladonna. When mixed with the dragon's bane and powdered bloodroot you will have a most lethal potion. You would not wish to inadvertently... injure yourself."

"Maybe that's exactly what I want, Professor," the man replied.

"Who are you?" Severus hissed, his eyes snapping up in shock. He had kept a low profile; no one here knew of his former profession. Dark eyes met green. He recognized the boy before him with a jolt of surprise. Although he was a boy no longer; the youngster had finally become a man. "Harry Potter," he answered his own question bitterly.

"Hello, Snape," Harry replied carefully. "Fancy meeting you here." He had the temerity to chuckle, but it was mirthless.

Severus sneered. "What do you want? Come to mock, like the rest?" Severus curled his traitorously shaking fingers into a fist, hoping Potter hadn't noticed his nervousness.

Harry gazed at him, his green eyes more intense than Severus had remembered. And he had brought the memories out many times over the years, cherishing them like treasured heirlooms from a past he could never go back to, would never *want* to...save for one reason. "No. I just came for what you are offering out." Harry smiled gently, and Severus' breath caught in spite of himself. "A remedy, that's what I hear you are the best at. Four Knuts and a Sickle?" Harry held out a Galleon. "Keep the change."

Severus felt uncomfortable with the whole transaction for some reason. This was a bad time for his conscience to prick at him. What was it to him if the savior wanted to buy poison? Still, the feeling in his gut...worry?...unfurled like a plume of smoke until he felt choked with it. "You are aware of how dangerous these ingredients are, Potter?"

Harry squared his shoulders, but the sparkle he had always carried with him was gone, replaced with grim intent. "I'm counting on it." Then he turned on his heel and was gone as quickly as he had come.

This was most troubling. Severus had no ethical obligation to see to it that his potions were used responsibly. On the other hand, it most certainly sounded as though Potter was planning something nefarious. He struggled with himself for the rest of the evening.

He locked up the shop and called it an early night, but when his sleep was disturbed and he tossed and turned, dreaming of bright eyes, he found that the decision was an easy one after all. Feeling like the biggest fool in the world, he dressed quickly and cast a finding charm. The faint trail led him on a twisted path through the town to a small flat on the outskirts of the city. It was obviously rented, but it was set apart and private. He breathed a small sigh of relief, knowing that at least his approaching humiliation would not have an audience.

He knocked formally, letting the sound ring out.

The time spun out with no answer.

He knocked again with more force.

Still nothing.

He began to feel a little unease. It was a small place; Potter should have heard him by now. Even if he had been out for the night, he would have returned by now. "Potter! If you don't answer this door, I am going to break it down!" he called, his voice still deep and measured after all these years, even in its distress. His own authority should have reassured him, but it didn't. There was no response.

He sighed. This didn't bode well at all. There seemed to be no other option. He didn't sense any wards on the doors, being a cheap rental. He raised his wand. "*Alohomora!*"

The door gave way with a soft click, and he pushed it open. The apprehension had bloomed into a flower of dread in his chest, stealing his breath and making his heart beat fast in the gloom. The tendrils of alarm twined about his neck and stole into his being, chilling him. A filament seemed to creep into his very heart and squeeze it to a stop with an icy glaze of fear.

Severus wanted to pause, to stop time. He knew with the clarity of the surreal what he would see if he looked. He didn't want to, but the prickles of dismay couldn't be put off, so he swallowed hard and faced what was yet before him.

Severus didn't have to look far to find Harry. He was laid out on top of the bed, fully clothed. He didn't so much as stir at the intrusion.

Severus approached the figure on the bed cautiously. Something was not right here, and he had a good idea what it was. Harry's chest was not moving. He was unnaturally still. He reached out to touch his face and it was not the warm glow of the living. Harry Potter was dead.

Severus' heart crashed. His own breath sounded loud in the room, and he suddenly, unfairly, didn't want to be the only one to partake of breathing. He couldn't help but feel irrational and wished that he could command his own heart to still in his chest just by sheer dint of will.

Severus knew what was coming, the feeling that was about to overtake him, and he rejected it. His head started to shake from side to side in denial... and then it was upon him, the terrible knowledge that couldn't be concealed any longer. Harry Potter was dead. Harry Potter was dead. His mind was struck and reeling from the bare truth. Harry Potter was dead, and he was never coming back.

There was a strange keening sound. Severus realized it was coming from him. He shoved his fist in his mouth and bit down. The pain distracted him for a moment. At least that horrible sound stopped.

He felt his legs give out, and unable to stand any longer, he sat on the edge of the bed, his weight causing Harry to lean into him. How? Why? Well, it was fairly obvious how. A wave of guilt crashed over him, but it was soon drowned out by a surge of grief so strong that he felt he might never be able to stand again. His chest felt pierced by a pain so strong that tears welled up. In a detached corner of his mind, Severus was a little disappointed that his entire body seemed to be turning on him. Just when he needed to be strong, he was crumbling.

He had thought he would have all the time in the world to tell Harry how he felt. Just knowing he was out there, walking around... that had been enough. Now all was lost.

Severus had been forgiven and forgotten by everyone, his part in the war over. He always thought he would be able to garner the courage to approach Harry when the time was right, to make it different, to somehow stop the awful slide of moments into the oblivion that was his future. Harry had always been his hope. He would never get that chance. Now he was alone: his dreams, his love, his very hope as dead as the body next to him.

His lip curled at his own contemptuous weakness. *Coward*, he thought. To himself or the boy, Severus didn't know. Perhaps both.

Severus looked at Harry, so peaceful. His heart wept for the boy who had borne so much. He couldn't help but reach out and touch his hand. It was cooling, but not cold. It was surprisingly soft. The touch felt so intimate, in a way he never could have dared if he had had to face Harry's green eyes staring back at him, judging him. He traced the veins lovingly, blue in stark relief against the pale white skin. He ran his fingers over the pink half-moon nails, slightly square and so different from his own long digits. He allowed himself to twine their fingers together in a way that he never would have in life.

He stared at that image: the old and the young, the warm and the cold, the hero and the pariah interlaced, locked together. Severus could feel his own pulse, but no answering one beneath his palm. A sob rose up in his throat. The alive and the dead.

He smoothed his thumb over the joints, the knuckles, the webbing between the fingers. It all moved so easily, like a doll at his command. Harry had never been a doll, not for anyone. The mere thought was scandalous.

To his horror, he couldn't stop touching Harry. Severus had been denied for so many years, by others, but mostly by himself. He had never allowed himself even the smallest measure of closeness to anyone or anything. Now the floodgates were open, and he couldn't stop. Why hadn't he told Harry how he felt in life?

He hadn't been a coward about anything except what had mattered most, it seemed.

Severus unbuttoned Harry's shirt. It should have felt like a violation, but it didn't. He needed to revere it before Harry's memory was held up in public display by those who'd never really known him. *He* had known him, perhaps better than anyone. He had looked inside his mind, after all. What secrets could he hold after that? The body was just a body, an empty vessel when the life it held had drained away. This was true for everyone, even the great Harry Potter.

The clothes gave way easily, and Severus was left to gaze upon a man who was rather unremarkable. The things that had made Harry special were gone from him now. They were his spirit, his mind, the fire in his eyes. The body that was left was a good one, but not god-like. It was just a body like any other. It was trim and slightly paler on the soft, hidden parts. The limbs were just that: parts of a whole.

Severus reached out and touched Harry's hair, almost to reassure himself that it was still him. In that moment, the feel of it under his hand was like an electric jolt of awareness. This was Harry Potter on the bed before him. Not any other man. The feel of the inky hair was not as he had expected. It was silkier than he would have thought. He'd thought that it might be coarse, but it was soft. Unexpected tenderness welled up. He sifted through the strands, and they parted to reveal the scar. That scar was so essentially Harry.

Severus traced it with a fingertip, and to his shame felt a flash of desire shoot to his groin. It was strong and potent. He had not felt that in so many years; it was nearly overwhelming. All thoughts of the right or wrong of it fell away, and for once he just did what felt best. He employed a tenderness that he never could in his real life, and he gently cupped Harry's face between his hands. He leaned in for a kiss.

He had not had the occasion to kiss many people in his life, both by choice and by rejection. Severus had no concern on either score now, so he was able to enjoy the sensation. He leaned in, completely free for the first time. He didn't have to think about what he looked like, or if his breath smelled bad, or if his hair were greasy. The worries that had always constrained him and kept him bottled up inside himself fell away in the face of total acceptance. This kiss would be tolerated. He would not fail now.

He pressed his lips against Harry's. They did feel cold, but that did not deter him. He had all the time he needed to get this right. He sighed and tilted his head, realigning the angle. There. That was it. He felt the different swells and ridges of Harry's lips, plump in ways that his were thin, curved in places his were not. The marvel of it made him pull back and stare. If only... but he knew better than to think about that. His whole life would be different but for 'if only'.

Severus ran his fingers over the planes of Harry's face, noticing the little dimple in the chin and the slightest bit of stubble that he must have missed that morning while shaving. He traced patterns over his chest and down his thighs. He smoothed his hands over the soles of his feet and around the ankle bones. They protruded more than he thought they would. This private part of Harry was awkward. Severus smiled to think that they had this small thing in common.

Harry's skin hadn't been that much cooler than Severus' own when he had begun his explorations, but as the hours wore on, the differences in the two men became apparent. Where Severus' skin was pliant and warm, Harry's was beginning to lose whatever intangible quality had defined him as animated. He lost his pink luster and settled into a more grayish color.

Severus knew nothing he could do would change it, but he cocked his head and tried chafing Harry's hand, wondering if he might suffuse a little of his own body heat, if only for a moment. No matter how long he rubbed, the hand remained resistant to his ministrations.

The fingers curled in slightly, stiffening in the smaller joints. The cold seemed to seep out of Harry and into Severus, not the other way around. This made Severus unaccountably sad, as if the physical manifestation of Harry's death made it more undeniable.

Harry's face stayed Harry's face, no matter how many times Severus kept checking it anxiously. It began to take on a different pallor, the strange look of death that could not be duplicated by any other means. It was indefinable, and Severus would be hard pressed to explain what was different about Harry's features, as he was right there the whole night, and nothing had changed at all. Yet there was a difference nonetheless. Perhaps it was a settling, a laxness of the muscles, but it took on a masklike appearance. The bones of Harry's face seemed to stand out just a little more than they had before, the skin stretched taut and shining over them.

Severus redoubled his efforts and explorations, not ready to let Harry go just yet.

The minutes ticked by and the night wore on. Severus stayed the same, at least physically, but each hour brought a new change in Harry. He got colder and stiffer. He looked more like wax and less like a person. His mouth fell open a little bit. Severus gently nudged it closed. Harry's skin felt papery already, as if it had never held any more moisture than the scrolls he had written on in school.

Severus' heart was torn anew. Harry was slipping away from him. He had gone somewhere Severus couldn't follow, both in spirit and now physically. The changes were already overtaking the shell that he had left behind.

He spent the whole night touching, tracing, pressing, feeling like he had never allowed himself to do with another human being before. He knew he had only this night. It would have to be enough, both his hello and goodbye in one.

When the time came, when he had lingered as long as he dared and the sun was starting to rise, he knew it was time. The tension was almost unbearable, the sweet ache in his groin undeniable, but at the same time it was nearly an afterthought.

Severus had never been such a slave to his body before. He had never had to fight the trembling, the urge to become wild and savage the body in the room with him. The time spent here was the important part, not this end. He almost regretted it, having to end it this way, but he had not foreseen having such a physical reaction to being with Harry, and he couldn't deny himself now. He took off his robes with trembling hands.

Severus lay down next to Harry and put his head on his shoulder. He drew in a shuddering breath, taking great care not to be too rough. He knew in the back of his mind it was a silly thing to worry about, that no one would care about how gentle he was, least of all Harry, but he would know.

Severus had never been fully unclothed with anyone before. Of course he was not a virgin; he had just never cared to reveal himself that fully and share that much of himself with another person. The feeling of skin-on-skin felt so intimate. He sucked in air between his teeth and lowered his body to Harry's unresisting one, pressing his length fully against the prone body. Severus was taller, and in his fantasies, he never knew how it would all work out. Now he could see that they were a perfect fit. Long legs twined together, stomachs aligned... Severus' breath hitched sharply. His erection hit Harry's groin at exactly the right spot. They would have been a good pair. All those years of needless worry.

Severus hooked a hand under Harry's knee, moving his leg and opening the smaller man up to his gaze. His ass was so firm, the hole embedded there so sweet... Severus traced the pucker gently, feeling the ridges beneath his fingertips. The muscle didn't have as much tensile strength as it might have in a different situation, and that was good, because Severus didn't have any lubricant with him. He moved closer, feeling the contact between them, loving the slide of the skin, the rubbing, the exquisite friction.

Severus supported himself with his arms and lined himself up with Harry's entrance. He gently worked himself in, the feeling of being completely surrounded by another body so foreign, yet profound. He held his breath, trying not to notice the iciness that both alarmed and excited him.

Once he was in all the way, he allowed himself to rest there a moment, feeling himself encased in Harry's body, surrounded by his essence. Then the primal urge to move overtook him and he couldn't stop his hips from bucking. Severus grabbed Harry's arms, desperate to feel him and hold him. He slid in and out of Harry almost frantically, but he couldn't stop it, it felt so good. He wanted to wait, to savor this, his last moment, but he couldn't hold back. It had been so long...

Harry's head lolled against his shoulder almost demurely as Severus slammed into him, his thrusts getting harder and wilder. Soon he abandoned all pretense at rhythm and just let himself pound into Harry with a wild fervor, the pleasure rolling through him. Harry took it woodenly, with easy compliance. Severus had wanted to be gentle, but it was too good. He felt his orgasm building, and when he saw Harry's head jerking in time to his thrusts, tenderness washed over him. Severus was doing enough movement for the both of them, and for a second, it almost seemed as if Harry moved his head. That small motion, one that implied that Harry might be a part of this in some small way, triggered the release that had been building. Severus let out a groan and climaxed in an almost violent spurt that just kept coming.

Afterwards, he leaned down and pressed his forehead against Harry's. The illusion was gone. He could see now that Harry was not here anymore, hadn't been for a while. It was time to go.

He magicked the mess away, but he didn't use any other means to clean up. Severus dressed Harry with care, putting each item on by hand and making sure all was set to rights before he left. The last thing he did was to fix Harry's hair, trying to muss it the way it normally was.

As he looked down upon the man who held his heart, he was surprised to see a tear on Harry's cheek. He reached down to wipe it off, startled, before he realized that it had fallen from his own eye. What was this? He never cried. Not for all the things he had seen, all the atrocities he had witnessed. How was it that he was crying now?

He walked to the door and didn't turn around as he left. It was too much to hope that Harry had saved one last person with his final act, but he felt his heart unclench a little at the thought of the last night spent with the boy with green eyes.