

The Cost of Conscience

by Keppiehed

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Prompt: memory, smell

A/N: This was written for Snape LDWS.

It wasn't until the door closed, sealing him into solitude, that Severus understood the magnitude of the task still before him. Of course he'd known what he'd done when he'd uttered those reviled words, but in the heat of the moment the adrenaline had been flowing. It was here, now, that sentiment was allowed to seep into him. He could only hold it at bay for so long, and emotion waited for silence to come forth.

Severus swallowed and sank into the leather chair of the Headmaster. It still smelled of him—but then it would; he'd been gone only a few hours. Could that be? Severus felt his loss so keenly that it seemed like years, but the testament was here in Dumbledore's office, the little things still fresh. The flowers in their vase had outlived the man who'd cut them. The lemondrops still retained their luster in the dish, not having time yet to grow stale and sticky. Severus could feel him in so many ways. There was not one thing that did not scream of Albus, though he hadn't been a man to mark his territory so overtly. It was in the living, if you knew where to look. And Severus couldn't help but see.

The vials of his memories, opalescent and shimmering. All Severus need do was reach out and pluck one to look inside the other wizard's mind. They were there in a cabinet, and the stab of grief was so sharp for a moment that Severus was tempted to do just that. He struggled to breathe past it, to turn his face away.

Severus' gaze fell to Albus' hat, which had been left behind. Severus picked it up, and he could still smell that peculiar scent that was unique to Dumbledore, and yet not unpleasant—he smelt of books and cotton candy, and somehow, curiously, he always had the aroma of the air before a thunderstorm. He was a comfort to everyone around him, and now he was gone. By Severus' own hand.

It wasn't until Severus saw drops of wetness staining the fabric that he realized he was crying. What was this? He'd never cried, not for all of the things in his long life, not for himself and certainly not for anyone else! He wasn't about to begin now! But as he sat in Dumbledore's office, in Dumbledore's chair, he clutched the hat of his one true friend to his chest, and he wept for the man who deserved the honor.

And when he was finished, he straightened his shoulders, resolved to never shed a tear for anyone again. Severus smoothed the hat and hung it where he could see it. He had a feeling he wouldn't be here long, but while he was, he would take comfort where he could.

A knock sounded, and Bellatrix entered. "The Great Hall has been destroyed! Come and see!"

"Excellent." Severus would need all the strength he could get. It was time to begin.