

J'accuse

by peskipiksi

What really happened when Snape was accused of being a Death Eater after Lily and James died?

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I suppose the only blessing was that they chose to come for me on the day of the school's November visit to Hogsmeade, so the little brats weren't around to see it. Dawlish, Savage, Proudfoot, Robards and, of course, Scrimgeour himself. Five against one. Well, I suppose they couldn't very well bring Dementors into the school, could they? Most of the students being absent, I had neglected to ward my office door. Foolish in the extreme. An elementary mistake for which I was now to pay.

I was clearing out my store cupboard when they burst in. The previous holder of my post had left it in a heinous state, and it had been driving me mad. My first thought was how ignominious it was to be arrested while ankle-deep in dragon eyes and Boomslang skins.

I can't say I hadn't been expecting it. The Ministry had already caught Dolohov, Travers and Mulciber; one of them had been bound to name me. Actually, it was on my information that Travers and Mulciber were apprehended. Surely that deserved some sort of recognition? But that's the trouble with working undercover never any thanks for risking your neck.

At least they'd been organised enough to bring a warrant. Scrimgeour read it out in the pompous, booming voice he has adopted since his promotion to Head of the Auror Office.

'Severus Snape, you are hereby accused of Death Eater activity and of continuing in the service of your fallen master... um... er... You Know Who.' *Very sophisticated*, I thought. I'd heard better speeches from my first years. He continued: 'You will be taken from this place to the Ministry of Magic for immediate trial before the Council of Magical Law.' *Immediate? Don't I get a lawyer? Ah, of course not. Don't be ridiculous, Snape Death Eaters don't get fair trials.* Still, at least I wasn't being thrown into Azkaban.

Yet.

I was profoundly grateful to meet no one on the walk through the grounds. The sight of the new Potions master being marched through the school flanked by half a dozen Aurors would have given them enough gossip to last them through to Easter.

As we walked, I began to contemplate my fate. I deserved to be in Azkaban. A lifetime with the Dementors could not be any worse than the punishments I heaped upon myself. I dwelt on Lily and my abominable conduct towards her constantly. I still do. It isn't a conscious decision; I have been moving through life in a sort of trance these past few weeks, all feeling numbed, suffocated by the terrible weight of grief and guilt. Nothing Azkaban had in store for me could be worse than that.

And if I were in Azkaban, I could find and kill the traitor, Black.

But what of my promise to Dumbledore? I swore, when he told me what had happened, to protect Lily's child when he comes to the school. Dumbledore is certain the Dark Lord has not been vanquished, that he will, one day, rise again, and I have sworn to resume my undercover work if... when that day should come. How could I do that from inside Azkaban? How could I atone for everything I had done? Of what use is atonement inside prison walls? Risking my life to protect the son of the woman I loved and the man I hated that is to be my punishment and my purpose.

By the time we reached the edge of the grounds, I had my story ready. Identities changed, dates changed. Just enough truth in it for me to recite it convincingly, and just enough fabrication for me not to break down in the telling of it.

Merlin willing.

They used Side-Along-Apparition to take me to the Ministry. Side-Along-Apparition! How humiliating. I am twenty-one; I have been able to Apparate for nearly five years now. But I suppose they couldn't risk me running off somewhere.

They took me to Courtroom Ten in the Department of Mysteries and put me in the chained chair in the centre of the room. I waited, apprehensively, for the chains to bind me there, but they did not.

Then I felt a penetrating cold, and my vision began to blur. I did not need to look behind me to realise they had brought Dementors into the courtroom to keep me there.

I was back on that windswept hillside, pleading with Dumbledore to help her, to protect her...

Occlumency, Severus, come on.

But I couldn't do it; the memories were so strong. I was sitting, slumped, in a chair in Albus' office and he was telling me Lily was...

Concentrate, Severus! Close your mind. Think of a colour. Not green. Not red. Blue. A clear, calming blue. I felt my heart rate slow; my breathing eased and my vision returned to normal as Mr Crouch began to speak.

'Trial of Severus Tobias Snape for Death Eater activity and continuing allegiance to He Who Must Not Be Named.

'Interrogators: Bartemius Crouch, Head of the Council of Magical Law; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department for Magical Law Enforcement; Rufus Scrimgeour, Head of the Auror Office. Court Scribe, Ezekiel Scrivener...'

'Witness for the Defence, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,' said a quiet voice behind me. I would have turned round, but I was just managing to keep the Dementors at bay; I had no desire to meet them face on.

Nevertheless, I felt a powerful wave of relief wash over me. Dumbledore knew the truth about me; he would defend me to the hilt. Then, just as quickly, I felt a wave of panic. Dumbledore knew the truth about Lily and me; nobody else must be allowed to know that. I hoped he would adhere to my story when he heard it, that was. I had made him swear never to reveal what he had called "the best of me". I just had to trust that he would honour that promise.

'Ah, Dumbledore,' Crouch said stiffly. 'You got our letter regarding the arraignment of your employee, then?'

'I must have missed it,' replied Dumbledore, cheerfully, 'but by happy chance, I was walking in the grounds as your employees escorted Professor Snape off the school premises. Intrigued, I followed them here.'

'Yes,' said Crouch, looking thoroughly disconcerted. 'Well, then. So. The charges. Yes.'

'Severus Snape,' he intoned, 'you are hereby charged with the crime of being a Death Eater, of continuing your allegiance to He Who Must Not Be Named and of rallying Death Eaters after the fall of... er... You Know Who. How do you plead?'

Dumbledore stepped in before I had a chance to speak.

'Severus Snape was indeed a Death Eater. However, he rejoined our side before Lord Voldemort's downfall...' (there was a collective intake of breath at the name; even I flinched) '...and turned spy for us, at great personal risk. He is now no more a Death Eater than I am.'

(I have since learnt that Dumbledore has used these words with alarming regularity to the court every time a captured Death Eater has tried to implicate me.)

Crouch did not look convinced. 'But evidence, Dumbledore! Proof!'

It was now or never. *I am sorry, Lily; I have to lie. Forgive me. Forgive me; I am doing this for your son.* 'I had Muggle friends,' I blurted out, 'when I was a child, before I started at Hogwarts.'

Behind me, Dumbledore froze. He thought I was going to tell them everything.

'You are Muggle-born?' Crouch asked coldly.

'Half-blood. Muggle father, witch mother. We lived in a Muggle area at my father's insistence. My friends were two sisters and a brother.' I had to distort the truth; the court didn't need to know that James wasn't Lily's brother, that Petunia despised me. 'They were killed by Death Eaters three months ago.' *Another lie: two weeks. Has it really only been two weeks?* 'I don't know who did it; I wasn't involved.' *Forgive me, Lily.*

'They were the only real friends I have ever had. We were not rich, and they were the only ones who did not laugh at my hand-me-down clothes. They used to take me in when my father was in a temper.' I was babbling, telling them far more than was prudent; if the court decided to follow up my story, I had just handed them the rope with which to hang me.

But the more I talked, the more "details" I gave them, the less likely they were to use Veritaserum or Legilimency on me. And, while I could perform Occlumency with consummate ease in front of the Dark Lord, I had learnt that in the presence of Dementors the memories overwhelmed me. If subjected to Legilimency here, I knew I would reveal all.

'You remained friends even after you attended Hogwarts?' Crouch's voice was disbelieving.

'I went home for the holidays,' I mumbled, looking at the floor, tears starting in my eyes. Although they certainly added to it, they weren't part of the performance; I always felt close to tears when I thought of Lily.

'Is this true, Dumbledore?' Crouch barked suddenly, turning away from me.

'After Severus' friends were targeted, he returned to our side,' Dumbledore said, neither denying nor confirming my story. 'He now works for me at Hogwarts. Any contact he has had with the Death Eaters in the last three months has been on my orders, to gather information for our side. As I am sure you are aware, Professor Snape's information led to the arrest and incarceration of Jonathan Travers and Edward Mulciber.'

'And you trust him, do you, Dumbledore?'

'I would trust Severus with my life,' Dumbledore answered calmly.

'Very well,' said Crouch coldly. 'It will be put to the vote.'

'Those in favour of clearing the accused of all charges?' said Madam Bones' booming voice.

The jury raised their hands: seven, eight, nine, ten. I began to breathe more easily as Madam Bones continued, 'And those in favour of conviction?'

Just two. An overwhelming majority in my favour. Crouch looked as if he was fighting the urge to break something. I was fighting the urge to break down.

'Very well, very well... cleared of all charges.' And, with that, Crouch swept out of the courtroom.

I sat, stunned, as the court and the public gallery emptied. I was free. Free to continue my life. My pointless, empty life.

I started as I felt a hand on my shoulder, heard a voice very close to my ear.

'I'm warning you, boy; you may have fooled the court; you may have fooled Dumbledore, but you don't fool me. I'll be watching you from now on, believe you me.'

'Alastor!' said Dumbledore's voice warningly, and I felt the pressure on my shoulder lift. 'You will excuse me, but I need to take my Potions master back to school. Come, Severus, I am sure you have lessons to plan.' And he swept me out of the court without so much as a backwards glance at Moody.

I managed to get back up to my office and remember to ward the door before tears of relief and the ever-present remorse began sliding down my cheeks.

A/N: This was inspired by the Chapter "The Pensieve" in GoF. I always wondered how much Dumbledore told the court to get Snape off the charges (he obviously didn't mention Lily). I also wanted to draw parallels between this and Harry's hearing in Chapter 8 of OotP. Too many quotes to list come from those two chapters.

Travers' and Mulciber's first names are not canon. The court scribe Ezekiel Scrivener's name comes from Ezekiel Cheever, court scribe for the Salem Witch Trials in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible".