

# Duty

*by severed\_lies*

Severus struggles for sanity during and after Charity Burbages murder.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Duty calls. It was once a siren's call, but now it dashes all of my hopes upon the rocky shore.

Breathless, despite my careful preparation, I struggle to maintain my carefully constructed Occlumency shields. The heart-pounding fear I quickly tamp down. I can do this, I must. There is so much more at stake than my budding romance with the woman now suspended in terror above the table. The children have to be protected to my best abilities. That will not happen if I give away my loyalties at this stage of the game.

I quickly take my seat, focus on my task and wait to be called upon to give my report. The Dark Lord does not care if he smells the fear rolling off of his servants, for fear is expected, but I have never been seen to flinch during the countless tortures I have witnessed during my service, and I shall not jeopardize my position now.

The Dark Lord takes my report as true, yet I must not show relief, for that might provoke suspicion. I suspect that some of my fellows are trying their hardest to discredit me and my hard-won information. Their jealousy of my new position is laughable. Would that they understand my true purpose, they would allow me not one more breath. My paranoia is a saving grace.

The screams from the dungeon set my nerves afire, but still I show no outward signs of discomfort. I fear that I know most of the current inhabitants of the Malfoy dungeons, even feel sorry for their families and friends who might never know what happened to their loved ones. It is small comfort to me that I still have a heart after all of the damage inflicted upon it. I force my concentration back upon the Dark Lord's movements.

Draco's palpable horror is most distressing. As long as I keep my eyes focused on his Lordship, I can keep the fear for my sweet friend at bay. But the boy's pallor is noticeably green, and he will not stop squirming! I must remember that Draco is no longer my immediate concern. Focus.

I will not remember that one perfect day last spring, that delicious cream cake, her violet robes. The memory of her sweet kisses can only bring about my death. The past is irretrievably lost. This is my reality.

It is shock, but that can be overcome. I am not going to lose control. I will not. Not as Lucius has, not as Bella has. I will not succumb to the madness that surrounds me. I will not imagine those soft hands at the base of my neck. Focus!

I must not look upon the table, for the moving shadow will remind me of her terrible position. Oh, not that. Not that. The hissing is unmistakable. I can no longer dismiss what is happening. I do not know how to stop the rising gorge.

It is over. I must remember how to breathe. At least there is no more fear or pain for her. No more laughter. No more cream teas. No more anything. Breathe!

I cannot cry out. I cannot move to help revive Draco. I have my duty. That is all that is left for me. I will not make an attempt to... recover the body. Her mother will not be able to bury her. I will never be able to speak with her again. Oh, please, dismiss us. I do not know how much more I can bear. Please.

I shall hold on to whatever sanity remains. Just a few more minutes, I am sure that He is done. I must go on, prepare for the worst yet to come. Focus on my duty, not upon those that I cannot save.

I cannot run to the gates, must not appear panicked. The cries of the peacocks mock me. They are allowed to do what I cannot.

If I had the power to banish every cream cake and every violet in the world, I would. My memory of that perfect afternoon will not be allowed to remain in my mind after today.

Duty. That is all that remains.