

One Picture

by MsTree

A short story set in the "Heaven or Hell" universe.

Only Chapter

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I own nothing of this work except the idea for this story. Everything else belongs to JKR and her assigned agents.

Author's Note: For some reason, the phrase "One picture is worth a thousand words" kept going through my mind the week before Severus' birthday and germinated into this story. Not counting the title, disclaimer, or these author notes, the body of the story is exactly 1,000 words according to MSWord's word count toolbar.

This is set in my "Heaven or Hell" universe and might contain some spoilers for that story. Read at your own risk.

Thank you to Fizzabella and linlawless for looking this over and suggesting some changes. I used some and discarded others, as an author is wont to do. Thanks again to Fizzabella, who encouraged me to post this when I was having second thoughts.

One Picture

Severus Snape stared at the photograph in the palm of his hand. It was a Muggle photograph; the woman looked out at him, unmoving, with a sad smile. Turning it over, he read the words written on the back: *For my son, Severus. Happy 12th Birthday, 9 January 1972*

Sighing deeply, he turned the photograph over and contemplated his mother's face, remembering.

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"Mum, could I have a picture of you to take with me?" eleven-year old Severus asked as the two of them packed his trunk for Hogwarts.

Eileen looked over at him while she mended some of the second-hand robes they had obtained in Diagon Alley the day before. "Money's a bit dear right now, Sev," she said, her hands stilled in her lap. "Still and all, it's not everyday my son goes off to Hogwarts. I'll see what I can do. Mind, it may not get done before you leave next week."

"But you could send it to me, right?" the boy asked. "I mean, there is ways of getting letters, isn't there?"

She nodded. "You remember the owls we saw yesterday?"

"The ones in the bird shop?"

"That's Eeylops," she said, smiling in remembrance. "They sell owls to carry messages back and forth for wizards and witches."

"Bet they're really dear, aren't they?" Severus asked, already knowing the answer before his mother could voice it.

"A bit more than we could pay right now," Eileen said. "There's also the owl post office for those like us who can't afford their own owl. And Hogwarts has school owls for the students to use."

Severus' face lit up. "So I can write to you? And you can answer my letters?"

Eileen looked up in alarm. "Yes, that's true. But your dad wouldn't like it much." She looked up from the robe she was hemming. "Keep them short," she said. "I have a Squib friend who would probably be willing to receive your letters for me and send mine to Hogwarts. I'll ask her."

"What about a photo?"

"She'll know how to do that, I imagine," Eileen mused. "If nothing else, I can send you a Muggle photo."

"What's a Muggle, Mum?"

"Someone who's not a witch or wizard, Sev." She shook out the robe and held it up. "Here, try this on. It should be short enough to wear this year, and we can let out the hem for next year if you don't grow too much."

Severus grimaced as he slipped the black robes over his jeans and t-shirt. He hated wearing other people's hand-me-downs. "Dad's a Muggle, isn't he? Is that why he's so mean?"

"He wasn't like that in the beginning," Eileen temporized, defending her choice of husband. "It was the mill closing down that turned him off magic. When you were a baby... Your dad really does love you, Sev."

She got down on her knees and examined the length of the school robes. "Stand up straight, Sev. I need to make sure this was done right."

Severus drew in a deep breath and stood straighter, looking at the far wall, while Eileen, walking around him on her knees, tugged at the hem.

"That's fine," she said. "I'll do the others the same length. Take this one off now."

He quickly divested himself of the hated robes and handed them over to his mother as she stood up. "When I leave school, I'll get a good job and you won't have to stay here," he declared with all the fervency of an eleven-year-old boy who loved his mother. "We'll get a good flat in Diagon Alley, and you can do magic all you want. And we won't have to wear second-hand clothes and..."

"Severus..." Eileen sighed at her son. He was bouncing eagerly at the idea of the two of them living together in the Wizarding world. "We'll see," she said softly. "You finish up packing those books now. We don't want your dad finding them."

Severus clutched the cherished books to his chest. Second-hand they might be, but they were precious for the knowledge they contained. Quickly, he stuffed them into his school trunk, sliding his Muggle clothing on top to hide them. Then he went back to his original question.

"What's the difference?"

"In what?"

"You said you could send a Muggle photo. What's the difference?"

"Oh." Eileen thought for a moment. "Wizarding photos move."

"They move? How?"

"I don't know," she said in exasperation. "Wizarding photos move and Muggle photos don't. It's magic."

"Will I learn how?"

"I imagine someone could teach you. There's some potions involved." Eileen smiled in reminiscence. "I always enjoyed Potions. You've my old Potions book, haven't you?"

Severus checked the books quickly. "I got it. What else will I learn?"

"Well, there's Charms and Transfiguration and Defence Against the Dark Arts..."

"Dark Arts? That sounds like fun."

"Severus Snape!" she snapped. "Don't think that. The Dark Arts are..."

"What, Mum?"

"They're evil, Sev," she whispered, her eyes wide. "Once you use them, you lose your soul. Promise me you'll stay away from them."

"I promise, Mum," he said, awed by her fear. "I promise."

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"I'm sorry, Mum," Severus mumbled. "I did try."

He slipped the photograph into a photo album that lay open on his desk. The Wizarding photograph of Eileen on the opposite page smiled at him and waved.

He compared the two photographs, one from the early seventies and the other taken just before he had left Hogwarts. Eileen's Squib friend had known how to take a Wizarding photograph, and she had sent it to him shortly after his mother's death.

"Severus?" Minerva McGonagall's head appeared in the fireplace. "It's time, dear."

He closed the photo album on the two pictures and looked at the fireplace. "We'll be right there, Headmistress." He looked over at his wife and smiled. "Are you ready for another year of teaching dunderheads?" he asked.

Hermione Granger-Snape grinned. "Let's go and see," she said, holding out her hand.