

Eileen's Hope

by Lady Whitehart

Even Severus Snape was once pure and innocent and, according to JK Rowling, greatly loved. A look at Snape's early life told from Eileen's POV. No, it's not another abuse/domestic violence fic.

Hopes, Dreams and Fears

Chapter 1 of 4

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A/N: The original fic this is based on was written prior to HBP as a Mother's Day gift to my readers. This new version has undergone some tweaking to make it canon compliant. To the best of my knowledge, it's the first story written about Sanpe's infancy. I hope you enjoy it.

Before I forget, the upcoming chapters will contain some religious content. No, I will not be preaching at you, but I would hate to offend anyone.

Part one: Hopes, Dreams and Fears

The insistent cry of a newborn yanked Eileen Snape from her first real bit of sleep since her son had been born two weeks ago. Next to her, her husband, Tobias, snorted and grumbled in his sleep. Quietly, Eileen fumbled under the edge of the mattress for her wand that she managed to keep hidden from her husband. She slipped out of the bed, wrapping herself in her dark-blue dressing gown. Once outside the bedroom, she hesitated before lighting her wand. Chances were that Tobias wouldn't wake up to check on her and the baby. Tiptoeing to the other room, part of her was thankful her husband was such a deep sleeper; she only used magic when Tobias was away or asleep. He had no idea that she was a witch. Someday she would tell him but not now.

The moment she entered the room, she lifted the tiny bundle to her shoulder. The baby's cries reduced to a faint whimper. The poor, wee lad was soaked! Gently, she changed his bottom, remembering to uncover, then re-cover him, to avoid ending up wet herself. When the task was complete, Eileen vanished the mess and adjusted his little gown. He opened his eyes, locking her in his unusually intent gaze. 'Unnatural' her husband had called it. She herself believed it to be a mark of great intelligence.

She smiled at him, and her heart filled with a love that knew no boundaries. She kissed his tiny nose and smoothed his fuzzy black hair. She cradled him in her arms, his head turning to her as his mouth worked frantically. Little Severus was developing quite an appetite!

She hummed to him softly as she settled in the rocking chair by the window. She winced slightly as he began to eat, smiling as he clutched her finger. He was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. His skin was smooth and pale. His jet black hair was soft, fluffy and thick. He had unusually observant, bright, black eyes that gave her the feeling that he could read her thoughts. Whenever he made eye contact with her, she made sure all that was in her thoughts was how wonderful and perfect she thought he was. Eileen loved her tiny son and hoped that his future would be bright. She wanted him to have a happy childhood, to know just how special he was. As he grew up, she hoped that he would be successful in everything that he attempted. Any mistakes that he made she hoped would be learning experiences. She wanted him to find a love that would last his lifetime. Above all, she prayed that he would always have the courage to do what was morally right.

Severus, she had winced at his name when her husband had decided on it. She did not care for the sound of it, so harsh and almost cruel sounding. However, as the loyal wife that she was, she said it was a fine name. In her scant spare time, she had researched the name to see why her husband had chosen it. Only to find that it was the

feast day of a saint on the day he was supposed to be born -- January eleventh. Eileen had laughed inwardly when her son arrived two days early, as if to protest the name. Yet, her husband had been determined to keep the name. She feared that it was but the beginning of strife between the two. No matter what, she was determined to put her son first.

Eileen sensed the incredible intelligence that her son possessed. She prayed that he would only use it for the greater good of the wizarding world. They needed righteous people in the world now.

From the few ties she still had in the wizarding world, she had heard rumors of a great evil that was rising. It was one of the reasons she left the magical world and married a Muggle. By mixing her pure wizarding blood with a Muggle's, she had hoped that her child would not be magical. But from the moment she first saw her son, she knew he was a wizard, one who would possess a great amount of power.

She looked out the window, watching the falling snow. Dreams of her son's future filled her head. Looking down, she noticed that he had fallen asleep, a dribble of milk on his chin. Lifting him to her shoulder, she patted his back and was rewarded with a hearty burp. The baby squirmed for a moment, before curling up. She rocked him for a few more moments, delighting in the warm weight of him against her shoulder. How she wished that she could just stay here like this, blocking out the rest of the world! With a sigh, she rose gracefully to her feet and placed him in his little bed, tucking the blanket around him. Stroking his downy, black hair one more time, she whispered, "Sleep well, my son, may the God of your father always be with you."

She slipped out of the room to try to squeeze in a few moments of sleep before the demands of the day were upon her once again.

A/N: January 11th is the feast of St. Severus of Alexandria. There is also a St. Severus of Avranches the patron saint of -- you guessed it -- weavers. That feast day is February 1st. Either would be very appropriate for a child born in Spinner's End.

Confessions, Questions and Quandaries

Chapter 2 of 4

Even Severus Snape was once pure and innocent and, according to JK Rowling, greatly loved. A look at Snape's early life told from Eileen's POV. No, it's not another abuse/domestic violence fic.

Disclaimer and legal stuff:

All things Potterverse do not belong to me.

They belong to J K Rowling, as you can plainly see.

She has a team of lawyers, who work both night and day.

Their only mission in this life is to keep plagiarists at bay.

So I write my disclaimer, to say I mean no harm.

Followed with a smile, as I turn on the charm.

I make not a single Euro or Yen, no Galleon, Sickel or Knut,

Not a dime or dollar, pound or quid, so please don't sue my butt!

A/N: No, poetry isn't one of my gifts, but at least one chapter must contain a poetic disclaimer. Anyway, thank you to Verity, my ever-loyal beta, for making sure this was fit for human eyes.

WARNING: There is a large amount of religious content in this chapter. If you think that you might find such content offensive, feel free to skip to the page break.

Chapter 2: Confessions, Questions and Quandaries

Snow blew around the solitary figure that tramped down the narrow street towards the chapel. Eileen Snape held on tightly to the basket containing her well-bundled son. Once or twice, she slipped the thick woolen mitten off of her hand to touch his face beneath the thin silk veil. His face was comfortably warm, and he turned his head to suck on her finger.

"Hungry again, little man?" she asked. "I'll feed you soon. I just need to stop at the chapel for a moment."

The young woman hurried up the wooden steps into the vestibule of the tiny church. Quietly, she closed the door behind her, slipping the black lace veil from her pocket and covering her hair with it. Making as little noise as possible, she walked to one of the pews near the back, setting her basket on the seat. Wearily Eileen sank to her knees, going over the words of the prayers in her mind.

Each time she went to the chapel, the same questions plagued her. What would she say? What could she say? She could hardly go in and say: "By the way, Father, I'm a witch." Keeping it a secret was wrong; she knew that. However, to bring her abilities out in the open would almost certainly spell disaster. A feeling of helplessness drifted over her. She sighed at her sad situation, hoping and praying that somehow, some way, she would be able to untangle herself from these tendrils of deception.

Off to her right, an old woman coughed. Severus stirred in his basket, making little smacking noises with his lips. Eileen smiled softly and helped him find his thumb. Maybe he would be content with that for a moment or two. No, for his sake she would keep her secret just a little while longer. Severus was dependent on her, and she was not about to let anything happen to him.

A rustle of velvet drape behind her signaled that the confessional was now vacated. Another young matron staggered exhaustedly to the front of the church to pray her penance. Eileen stood up and hefted the little basket. Proper or not, she didn't feel right leaving Severus in the pew all alone. Straightening her veil, she slipped behind the thick drape.

"Bless me, Father..." Eileen began as usual. She continued with the usual litany of human failings, adding a few new ones that had come about through the course of

motherhood. The old priest, Father Carrington, listened patiently, offering words of advice and comfort.

Father Carrington gave her a penance and granted her absolution. "I absolve you of your sins: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

She gracefully made the Sign of the Cross. "Thank you, Father."

"One more thing before you go, Eileen."

Eileen whispered in surprise, "How did you know it was me, Father?"

"I recognized your voice, my child." She could almost *hear* the smile in his warm tone.

Eileen nodded and smiled in return, even though her confessor could not see her.

"You will be having your son baptized this Sunday after Mass? He is over two weeks old now." There was a touch of sternness in the kindly voice.

Eileen frowned. She had known from the day she had discovered that she was pregnant that this would be inevitable. She herself had been raised on the fringe of the Church, attending services only on rare occasions. Many families had, from time to time, intermarried with Muggle-borns, who continued to follow the traditions of whatever faith they had grown up with. Witches and wizards learning to reconcile their abilities with religious upbringing was nothing new, and Eileen was no exception.

When she had married Tobias Snape, she had married his religion as well. Making the transition from someone who attended services mainly at Christmas and Easter to being much more devout had been difficult at first. Her magical abilities had to be kept a secret. Besides, she had then...and still did...sincerely doubt that Tobias would have believed her anyway. As a result, he was blissfully oblivious to the fact that she was a witch, and she was hoping to keep it that way. If he ever found out, she was afraid that he would abandon her. Then she would be forced to return to her father's house with her infant son in tow. A thought she couldn't bear to even consider.

"Eileen?"

"Forgive me, Father, my mind was wandering," she said hurriedly.

"Will you be having him baptized this Sunday?"

"Yes, Father, we will."

"Good, good. And have you selected godparents?"

"Yes, Tobias's oldest sister and her husband will be his godparents. They are very excited about it." Severus began shifting about in his basket, making his presence known at last with tentative whimper. Eileen reached down to comfort her son, helping him find his thumb once again.

Eileen thanked the priest. As she exited the confessional, Severus gave a loud, frustrated wail, making it quite clear that he was truly hungry and not just bored. With a tired sigh, Eileen exited the chapel; she would pray while she fed her son.

Once home, Eileen shook the snow from her coat. She went straight to the kitchen, set the baby's basket gently on the table and began to add wood to the fire in the cook stove. The swaying movement of the basket on the walk home had soothed the baby, and Severus had fallen asleep under his warm blankets. Pulling the old rocking chair closer to the warmth of the fire, the young mother settled down to rest. The baby apparently noticed the changes in his surroundings, and he began stirring once again.

His mother settled him comfortably in the crook of her arm as she nursed him. Once or twice, he paused to look at her with his dark eyes *Unnatural*. That was how Tobias had described the baby's intense gaze. Eileen knew better. She smoothed his hair. "You're magic just like me, my wee laddie. I was hoping you wouldn't be, then maybe, just maybe we could live in peace. But never you mind. I love you all the same."

As she rocked her son, she remembered that she had yet to say her penance. The words flowed in time with the rocking of the chair. "Our Father..."

Later that evening, Eileen was awakened by the rattling of the front door. Tobias was home from work. She had fallen asleep in the rocking chair while feeding the baby! She didn't have any dinner made, not even hot water for tea.

"Eileen?" her husband called as he entered the kitchen. The sight of his dirt-smudged face and mussed dark hair caused her to guiltily bite her lip. He looked at her, and a concerned look crossed his face. "Is everything all right?"

"I fell asleep in the chair," she admitted, carefully placing the sleeping baby in his basket. "There isn't a hot meal for you. I'm so sorry. Please don't be angry."

His face clearly showed his disappointment. Eileen waited to see if he would raise his voice in anger, but he refrained from commenting. Instead, he shuffled over to the basket where Severus was sleeping, staring down in wonder at the small being that had intruded on his quiet existence. The baby squirmed for a moment as he settled more comfortably under his blanket. Tobias shook his head. He whispered, "I see you've kept your mam busy today. Just from now on, try not to wear her out until *after* she has supper on the table."

"Shh... Tobias, you'll wake him," Eileen warned softly, smiling in spite of herself. She was heating water in the kettle for tea. Luckily there was some leftover ham in the cold cupboard, tinned tomatoes, a loaf of bread... She set the table as her husband took his spot. She started to heat the ham on the cook stove before she set about slicing the bread and opening the tin of tomatoes.

When the simple meal was ready, they bowed their heads and gave thanks before tucking in. Eileen had hardly touched her meal when the baby demanded her attention again. At first, she decided to let him fuss to see if he would settle back down on his own. When his demands were not immediately met, he wailed louder, squirming uncomfortably. With a sigh and a quick glance at her husband, Eileen quickly moved to pick him up.

No sooner had she lifted him to her shoulder than he left out huge belch, settling immediately back against her shoulder. Eileen flopped into her chair and tried to eat with one hand.

"Hearty little man, isn't he?" her husband asked as he continued to shovel food into his mouth.

"I've nothing to make a comparison." Eileen shrugged. "I spoke with Father Carrington today; he wanted to make sure we were having Severus baptized this Sunday."

"I spoke with my brother-in-law, he and my sister will be sure to attend this weekend." He frowned deeply. "Will your family be there?"

Eileen's pale face turned even paler. Tobias knew little about her family, save that her father and brother were overbearing. The few times he had met her family, he had understood that they were more than a little 'odd,' and that she really didn't want much to do with them. Her mother, father and two of her four brothers had attended the nuptial Mass and had placed the announcement in the Daily Prophet. They had only been around to the house when she first told them that she was pregnant and then again after she told them that the baby had been born. Other than that, they had-- thankfully -- left her alone. "I suppose I should tell them. Severus is their only grandson and all."

"Mind your brother, William, behaves himself. I would not like to give him a thrashing on the Sabbath," Tobias grumbled between mouthfuls, his fist clenching his fork tightly, "and especially not at my son's Baptism."

Eileen cringed at the memory of when her brother had first met Tobias. The two had hated each other instantly. She knew that her husband was a strong man, but her brother could make Tobias suffer or even kill him with a word or two and a wave of the wand. The last thing she wanted was to lose the first person who had cared about her. She absently patted the baby's bottom, praying that she was strong enough to protect them both--Tobias and Severus, the only two people that mattered to her.

"I'll make sure they mind their manners," she promised, reaching across the table to stroke the back of his long-fingered, rough hand.

Later that night, Eileen fell into bed utterly exhausted. Tobias made a halfhearted overture that Eileen quickly turned down, reminding him that the midwife had told her to wait at least until the baby was six weeks old. She was thankful for that bit of advice, as she was still quite sore and was not up to suffering *that* just yet. Well, not suffering exactly, she enjoyed his touch, completely and shamefully. He settled for pulling her more closely to him, stroking her hair and kissing her neck.

Just as they were beginning to drift off, the baby began whimpering in the other room. The whimper changed to a pathetic, pleading cry, before switching to a full-fledged howl. Eileen went to fetch him. Her breath hung in the air like a little cloud. When she picked Severus up, she noticed that his little nose, fingers and toes were terribly cold. She very well could have used a Warming Charm on his blankets, but she felt a heart-wrenching need to have him close to her. With a sigh she took him back to the bed.

"What s'matter?" Tobias muttered, half asleep.

"It's too cold. He'll have to sleep with us," she whispered, fumbling with the buttons of her nightgown. The tiny body settled down for a middle of the night feeding.

Tobias rolled over to touch his son with the tips of his fingers, a look of wonder in his sleepy eyes. "Lucky bloke."

Eileen shifted slightly, wincing as the little mouth took a firmer hold on her. Maybe if she kept him in the bed, she would actually be able to get some sleep.

"I love you, Eileen," Tobias said softly.

It wasn't something he normally said, so she opened her eyes wide in surprise. Looking at him as he watched his son, their son, the outward symbol of their love, she felt a rush of warmth that banished the cold of that January night. She reached out to touch his face, whispering, "And I love you, Tobias."

In her heart of hearts, she knew that she had to tell him her secret and hope that the love she saw in his eyes was stronger than any anger he would feel towards her for keeping such a thing from him. For all three of their sakes, she prayed that their love would be enough.

Here's hoping that the Snape household wasn't quite as grim as we have been led to believe. I'm such an optimist. I'm even more of an optimist by thinking I will get reviews.

Revelation, Retribution and Renunciation

Chapter 3 of 4

It should have been such a happy day for the young Snape family... When a secret is revealed, lives are changed forever.

A/N: To everyone who has been reading, thank you. To those who have been reading and reviewing, thank you very much for encouraging and supporting me.

Warning: This story contains religious content.

Chapter 3: Revelation, Retribution and Renunciation

Early Sunday morning, Eileen stared out the front room window, watching the falling snow. *Perhaps they won't come. No one would want to travel in such weather... Even in a magical way.*

She was hoping against hope they would decide to miss her son's baptism. Seeing her mother and father would be at least tolerable, but to have her brother in the house...

Eileen shivered, drawing her dressing gown closer to her. She started when her husband came up behind her and wrapped his long wiry arms around her. "This weather is unbelievable, isn't it. I don't ever remembering this much snow in my life, let alone in one winter."

"Should we take him out, Tobias?" Eileen asked, hoping that her husband would want to stay home.

"It's only barely cold enough to snow; any warmer and it will change to rain. I'd rather take Severus out in the snow than in a cold rain," her husband answered. "Just bundle him up well." He handed his wife a small package wrapped in brown paper. "This is from my sister; she wanted to make something for her godson."

Eileen carefully opened the package and held up a simple white baby gown. For all of its simplicity, it was well-made from excellent quality linen and would last through several children. She held it to her cheek. Making her way across the tiny room to where Severus was squirming in his basket, she draped the pristine garment over him, admiring the contrast between the white fabric and his black hair. He looked so sweet and innocent.

Her sister-in-law had been so quick to accept her, if only her family had taken to Tobias as readily. Her parents had been tolerant of the match; it had saved them from trying to marry off the youngest child who stood to inherit so little of the family's tiny wealth. This was further complicated by the glaring fact that she didn't even have a pretty face or a sweet disposition to make up for it. Actually her parents had seemed rather relieved. Her eldest brother on the other hand...

"He looks to be a right handsome lad," Tobias said with obvious pride in his voice. He slipped his rough work-worn finger into the baby's hand, smiling at his son's firm grip. "Healthy and strong, just like his mam."

Eileen admired her tiny son. "I can't believe she went to all of that trouble. It's so beautiful and perfect."

"My sister is very fond of Severus... and you," he said, kissing the top of her head. "Enough dawdling. If we're going to Mass this morning to have Severus baptized, we need to get moving."

With a sigh of resignation, Eileen hurried to dress and brush her hair. As she changed the baby and looked down at his sweet face, she felt an unaccustomed wave of optimism wash over her. Perhaps everything would be fine after all.

With the snow blowing around them, Eileen and Tobias made their way to the chapel. His sister and her husband were already there, and to Eileen's relief, her family was nowhere in sight. Perhaps things would go well after all. Tucked in his warm nest, Severus slept soundly through the service. As they stood for the final blessing, Eileen relaxed, certain that she was spared any embarrassment only her family could provide.

After the Mass was finished and the chapel was empty except for the family and a few older people, Eileen reluctantly took Severus out of his carrying basket, worrying that it was far too cold for such a small baby. No sooner had the priest invited them to bring the baby forward and began the opening rites than he stopped mid-sentence. Eileen turned to see what caused the strange expression on his face, and she felt her heart sink. Standing at the back of the chapel were three figures dressed in long, dark, fur-trimmed cloaks. Her parents and brother had decided to come after all.

Horrified, Eileen watched as they found places in the pews. The young mother forced her attention back to her son and the rite, focusing on the Latin. The baby took everything well enough until the icy water from the font was poured over his head. He howled in protest as he was proclaimed a member of the Church in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some of the old ladies smiled at the sound of his healthy lungs. Eileen turned her dark eyes to meet her husband's soft brown ones. There was no mistaking the love and pride that shone in them.

Father Carrington congratulated the young parents and gave the family a final blessing. Eileen tried to listen to his kind words, but her eyes kept straying to her parents and brother. She barely heard Tobias' sister as she explained that their youngest child was ill and being looked after by the older ones, and they needed to go straight home. Eileen managed to acknowledge her when her sister-in-law promised to visit as soon as possible. Eileen thanked her for the baby gown, promising to use it for their next child. Her sister-in-law gave her a parting embrace before she and her husband prepared to brave the weather. Now she had no choice but to face her parents.

"Oh, let me see him, Eileen," her mother crooned, her eyes bright with happy tears, as she hurried forward.

Eileen hesitated, trying to come up with an excuse to tell her mother. "Wait until we get to the house, Mother. It's too chilly in here for him."

"Nonsense!" The old woman wasn't about to be put off.

"Eileen," her father broke in softly, "your mother hasn't seen him yet."

"Fine, but just for a moment, I need to get him home for a feeding." She handed the baby over to the waiting arms of his grandmother. What if they Disappeared with him?

Instead of vanishing with her grandson, the old woman cuddled and fussed over the infant. Severus made a cooing sound in response to the attention. Her father joined in the affectionate display, but her brother watched from a slight distance, a greedy look in his eyes.

Eileen shivered; although she wasn't certain if it was from the cold or the expression on her brother's face. She reached out for her son. "Please, Mother, it's cold in here."

"Oh, very well," the woman said, reluctantly returning Severus to her daughter.

William took a few steps forward, asking, "Is he a *normal*, healthy child, Eileen?"

Tobias, who had to this point remained silent, now became defensive and stood behind his wife. "Of course he is. Eileen takes excellent care of him. He's strong and healthy."

"I am certain she's an exemplary mother, Tobias," the older woman said, diffusing the potential for an unpleasant exchange. "As Eileen pointed out, it is rather cold in here. Perhaps we should be getting the baby to your home. I would rather like to fuss over him a bit more." Eileen's mother smiled warmly at her son-in-law while casting a warning look at her son. Eileen knew that William would never dare cross their mother.

Eileen looked at her husband and tried to force a weak smile as she bundled the baby back into the carrying basket. She hoped to smooth all of this over with Tobias on the walk home. She felt she might be able to... if only they were going home by way of Belfast.

Tobias quietly closed the door behind him. "I honestly don't mind having your parents here, but I didn't expect you brother to tag along."

"Neither did I," she admitted with a sigh. "He came with Mother and Father; I can't very well send him away."

"Then we will just trust him to behave himself, and if he doesn't, I'll throw him out on his ear." He took her coat and hung it on the line of pegs next to the door.

A stab of fear shot through Eileen. "Please, let Mother handle him. He knows better than to cross her."

"I take it your mother was the disciplinarian."

Memories of the punishments inflicted on her and her brothers came to mind. Eileen answered, "Believe me, there was no such thing as waiting until Father got home. In fact, I would have preferred to deal with Father when I was in trouble; he was far more lenient than Mother, even on her gentle days."

Tobias shook his head in disbelief. "I can't imagine your mother thrashing anyone."

"She didn't have to," his wife answered dryly.

A knock sounded at the door before Tobias could question her further. He opened the door and welcomed his wife's family into their home. Eileen's mother praised her daughter's house-keeping skills as she handed over a covered basket containing some of her daughter's favorite foods. Her father shook hands with his son-in-law and kissed his daughter. William, however, hung back and looked about the room with sneer, clearly conveying that the tiny dwelling was not worthy of accommodating his presence. There was a painfully awkward moment before Tobias retreated to the kitchen with basket.

While he was gone, Eileen's parents settled on the old sofa and engrossed themselves with the pleasant task of spoiling their only grandson. William stood over them, watching the baby with that same greedy expression he had had at the chapel.

"Oh, Eileen, he's so beautiful!" her mother gushed. "I take it he is eating and sleeping well."

"He still sleeps almost all day and is up mostly at night, but he's a very good baby."

Her father looked up at her. "Perhaps you could come and visit once the weather is warmer."

"Oh, yes, Father," William scoffed behind them. "I'm certain all of your friends would love to meet your son-in-law. Shall I invite some of my associates over that evening as well?"

"It would be limited to immediate family," their father replied bluntly, ending the conversation.

William pressed on. "Don't you think they would love to see how much the Prince family allowed itself to be lowered? Money dwindling... land sold... daughter permitted to marry riffraff... bloodlines diluted... How very... impressive."

"William, that's quite enough!" the Prince family matriarch snapped. "We are content with your sister's choice in a husband, and you should be as well."

"She has been stripped of her heritage, Mother! She has been forced to turn her back on what she is." He pointed a long, thin finger at Severus, who let out a whimper. "Do you honestly think your grandson will ever be permitted to visit you and learn our ways? I am positive it will not be allowed. His sire is nothing but..."

"Stop it, William," Eileen pleaded, and Severus began to cry in protest at all of the chaos around him. She held her son to her shoulder, trying to comfort him.

"I suggest we get a few points settled," said a resolute voice from a cross the room. In response to the commotion, Tobias had entered the room, his eyes blazing in anger. "I didn't force your sister to convert, William; that was her own choosing. All I asked was that our children were raised in my faith."

"This is not a question of religion! Far from it! Eileen has other secrets... darker secrets to keep from you. She--"

William was unable to finish his sentence. In desperation, his mother had drawn her wand and hexed his mouth closed. Tobias stared uncomprehendingly at the delicately carved piece of wood in his mother-in-law's shaking hand. "Bloody hell!"

"Get out all of you!" Eileen screamed, tears streaming down her face. The baby's wailing became even louder.

"Eileen, I'm so sorry," her mother whispered, her hand pressed to her mouth.

Her father reached out to her, clearly upset by the abrupt revelation. "Your mother and I--"

"Just leave." Without warning, her parents and brother vanished with a loud crack.

"Holy Mother of God!" her husband cried, falling to his knees.

Eileen turned away from him and did her best to quiet the shrieking baby. Once things had quieted around him, his screams turned to a hiccupping cry and finally faded to a whimper. She held his tiny shaking body to her, feeling his heart pounding wildly. All of this upset couldn't be good for him. She stroked his hair, pleading, *Please don't let him die. I may lose Tobias, but I can't lose my son.*

Only after the baby was calm did she dare look at her husband. Tobias Snape was kneeling in the middle of the room, clutching the crucifix on his rosary. His face was pale, and his eyes were wide with disbelief. Slowly the frightened look turned into a dangerous one. For the first time, Eileen was afraid of her husband.

"I don't suppose you want to tell me what exactly is going on here."

Severus gave another miserable hiccup, distracting her. "I..."

"Eileen, I want to know what is going on, and I want to know now!"

She lowered her head. For better or for worse, the truth was going to come out. She took a deep breath and steeled herself as if she was about to dive headfirst into an icy lake. "I'm a witch, Tobias. My entire family can use magic."

There was a dreadful silence in which the only thing that could be heard was the baby's whimpering. Tobias snorted a weak laugh. "There's no such thing."

No, she never expected him to believe her. "Some people have a gift..."

"No, there must be another explanation," he said, cutting her off.

"I-I can prove it if you don't believe me." Without waiting for him to answer, she retreated to the bedroom. After tucking the baby in between two pillows, Eileen dug her wand out of the back of the drawer. She stared at the finely carved piece of ash with its core of unicorn hair. It looked like a child's toy, but it held the power to hurt or heal, give pleasure or pain.... What would she do if Tobias decided to abandon her and the baby? She kissed her son and headed back down the stairs all the while thinking, *What if he leaves me? What if he decides to take the baby from me? Will I be forced to hurt him to keep my son?*

Downstairs, Tobias was standing mutely where she had left him, conflicting emotions shifting across his face. She said, "Go get something off of the shelf. It doesn't matter what it is; just pick up anything."

He stumbled over to one of the shelves and picked up a book...*Grimms' Fairy Tales*, no less...and held it out in his hands. Eileen waved the wand and said, "*Mariposis!*"

With a snap and a puff of blue-ish smoke, the book turned into a butterfly, left her husband's shaking hands, and fluttered about the room. Tobias...half-amazed, half-fearful...watched it until Eileen whispered another incantation, causing the butterfly to disappear and the book to fall to the floor.

"How did you do that?" He picked up the fallen book, turning it over in his hands, looking for evidence of a trick.

"It's called Transfiguration," she said as matter-of-factly as possible, hoping to make it seem like a normal thing. "Transfigured objects don't stay transfigured, so it's really only helpful for the short-term. I can..."

"How could you keep something like this from me?" Tobias snarled suddenly. There was no ignoring the sense of anger and hurt in his voice. Any hope that Eileen may have harbored for a peaceful outcome was destroyed with those furious words.

"I never said anything to you because I doubted you would believe me."

"You should have told me!"

"I couldn't!" She covered her face with her hands, sobbing, as he screamed things at her, using words she had never hear him utter no matter how angry he had been. "I never meant to hurt you, Tobias. Please, believe me."

"Why should I?" Tobias shouted.

Eileen turned her beseeching face towards him. "Because I love you."

"You don't know anything about love, Eileen!" Tobias snapped. "You don't *lie* to people you love! You don't *trap* someone you love with deceit."

The words hurt more than if he have struck her. She lowered herself into the nearest chair and continued to cry. She looked up when she heard the doorknob rattle. "Where are you going?"

"Out!" He snatched his coat from the its peg by the door, thrusting his arms into the sleeves.

"When will you be back?"

"I don't know." He jammed his hat on his head and flung open the door. *If I come back, it will be to get my things.*"

The pitch of her voice rose with panic. "You have to come back! Think of Severus; he needs you."

"If he's going to be the same as you, I don't want anything to do with him." Tobias slammed the door behind him.

Eileen stared at the door, trying to decide what to do. She jumped to her feet and yanked it open. Outside, the light snow had changed to a frigid rain, obliterating the traces of footprints so that she couldn't tell which way he had gone. In desperation, she called his name, but there was no answer...not that she really had expected him to answer. She stepped back into the house and closed the door behind her. There wasn't anything else to do but wait and see if he returned.

She slowly climbed the stairs to their bedroom. Curling up on the bed beside her son, Eileen went over the morning's disaster in her mind. This never would have happened if her brother had stayed away. Her mother and father would have kept her secret, but William had to poke his cruel, prying nose into her life. There was no doubt in her mind that his actions had been intentional. He had adamantly opposed her marriage to Tobias from the start. He had called her a blood-traitor more than once and had refused to attend her wedding. Now he had purposefully exposed her secret, knowing that her husband would most likely leave her. But why would William do such a thing? Spite? Possibly. So he could gloat when she was forced to return to her parents or starve in the streets? There wasn't much chance of that happening. She may not be the most talented individual, but she wasn't entirely without resources.

A tapping noise at the window startled her. Eileen could see the outline of an owl. As soon as she opened the window, the drenched bird landed on the footboard of the bed and shook the water from its feathers. Eileen took the letter from the bird's beak. At first, she thought it was from either her parents or her brother. Catching sight of the official seal, she realized that things were even worse than she thought.

Dear Mrs. Eileen (Prince) Snape,

At approximately 11:22 this morning, the Ministry of Magic received notification that two spells were performed in the presence of your husband, Tobias Snape: Muggle. Under normal circumstances, a representative from the Ministry would be dispatched to confiscate and destroy your wand and Obliviate the Muggle in question. However, due to the 1927 amendment pertaining to Spousal Information to section 13 of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy, we will assume that you have decided to inform your spouse of your abilities.

If this is not the case, please contact the Ministry of Magic immediately, and a representative from the department of Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes will send an Obliviator to your home to rectify the situation. Please bear in mind that you may be subject to a fine of up to 500 Galleons.

Sincerely,

Reginald Hornby

IMPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE

Ministry of Magic

On a more personal note, I would like to take the time to congratulate you and your husband on the birth of your son.

RH

She reread the letter a few more times to reassure herself that the Ministry would not be barging in any moment and taking her wand. The second part of the letter troubled her. Now that she had been given the opportunity to make it as if the ugly incident had never happened, Eileen was tempted to just allow the Ministry Obliviate Tobias and have him remember some heated argument with her brother over religion. It would be so much easier to have Tobias return to his state of blissful ignorance.

"But I would know," Eileen whispered to herself. Now that Tobias knew her secret, it was better to deal with the situation...no matter what the outcome would be.

Severus woke up, smacking his lips. Eileen realized that he hadn't been fed since before church. She kicked off her shoes and slid herself and the baby under the warm blankets. Settling him next to her, Eileen smoothed her son's hair as he ate. There wasn't much sense in dwelling on her brother's motives. For now, she would focus on her son. The exhaustion that had been pressing her for the last several weeks began to take over. Eileen felt her eyelids grow heavier and heavier until she drifted off to sleep.

The creak of the floor boards woke Eileen from a deep sleep. Tobias was standing at the foot of the bed, watching her and the baby. There was a tender look on his countenance that made her wonder if she was actually waking up from a vividly horrible nightmare. She carefully sat up, closing the front of her dress. "You're back."

"I am." The gentle expression on his face hardened. He turned away from her and pulled a battered haversack from the tiny closet.

"What are you doing?"

"Packing." He began to stuff his clothing into the pack. "I'll be speaking with Father Carrington by the end of the week to arrange a hearing for an annulment."

"An annulment?" The thought of their marriage no longer existing made her heart skip a beat. It hurt that he didn't even want to admit that he had ever been married to her. "What are you going to tell him?"

"Something you wouldn't understand.... the truth," Tobias said coldly. The words were like a slap across the face. Eileen sat on the bed, making herself hold back a fresh round of tears. "And just so you know, I'll be petitioning for custody of Severus. He will not be raised under your ungodly influence."

"You cannot take my son away from me! Do you honestly think any Church official will actually believe you when you tell them your wife is a witch?"

"You'll show them."

"I can't do that, Tobias." He glared at her, and she rushed on to explain. "The only Muggle, non-Magic person, I'm allowed by law to let know about abilities is you. It's permitted because we are expected to trust the person we married."

His voice rose angrily, dangerously. "Yet you didn't think it was worth mentioning before I was trapped..."

"Why did you ask me to marry you?" Eileen broken in quietly.

"What?"

"Why did you ask me to marry you?" she repeated. "I'm not pretty, my cooking is mediocre, I have no real accomplishments to my name, and no money to speak of."

"I was attracted to you." He clenched his rough hands into fists. "Maybe you had something to do with that, some spell or some concoction."

"To what end? Why would I forsake a reasonably comfortable life for one of hard work and struggle?" Severus began to stir, and Eileen picked him up. "My parents would have found a match for me; I wouldn't have ended up a lonely spinster unless I wanted to."

Tobias didn't move or speak. He looked at the floor.

"I love you, Tobias, but I will not try to hold on to you if you don't want anything to do with me." She stood up, shifted the baby to one arm, and took a few hesitant steps toward her husband. "I was wrong to keep what I am from you. I broke your trust in me, and in the process, I hurt the two people I love most in this world: you and Severus. Look at me... look at us... and tell me you don't love me. If you can do that, I will do what you ask and free you from this marriage."

He kept his head bowed, and Eileen could see that he was shaking slightly. She reached out to touch his hand. When he didn't pull away from her, she slipped her small hand into his large one. Tobias' eyes met hers, and she could see the conflict reflected in his dark brown eyes. He was furious with her, but she didn't blame him for that. There was a flicker of love that encouraged her. After a while, his other hand brushed back several black strands of hair that had pulled loose from the knot at the back of her head.

Tobias looked at his son. "I want to forgive you...for his sake. But I don't know if I can."

"If you would be willing to try to forgive me, I would give up magic. But I don't want to make the same mistake twice. When and if Severus shows signs of magic, I want to tell him." When Tobias opened his mouth to protest, she held up her hand to keep him from interrupting her. "If he is like me, he will need to learn how to control his abilities, how to use them wisely. Magic is both a wonderful and dangerous thing. It can be used for noble purposes, or it can be twisted by greed."

Tobias stared down at his son. Eileen wondered if he shared her thoughts. How could the soft bundle in her arms ever be anything but innocent and pure? Eileen was not naive. The magical world contained as many dangers and temptations as the Muggle one. Preparing her son to shoulder the responsibility that accompanied his abilities was not a mistake she could afford. Just before she married Tobias, she had heard there were several purebloods within the Ministry who were pushing for change... high level positions to be held only by those with pure bloodlines... Muggle-borns to have no status within the wizarding world... Muggles...

She didn't want to think about the fate of Muggles if any of these things came to fruition. She herself was considered a blood-traitor, contaminated by the Muggle to whom she had committed herself. The only way to protect her son was to teach him how to live in such a precarious world. She began to feel light-headed from the scope of the obligation before her.

"Eileen, are you all right?"

"I'm fine." She looked from her son to her husband. The baby was wide-awake, observing her with a gaze that suggested he knew exactly what was at stake. "I just realized how difficult it will be to raise him. Tobias, I can't do this alone. He needs both of us."

Tobias touched the side of her face. "I made a vow to spend the rest of my life with you; no matter what God decided to test us with. I will honor that vow."

Gratitude washed over her so powerfully that she couldn't even begin to thank him. She gave a choked sob and rested her head on Tobias' shoulder. Eileen felt the familiar sensation of his arms around her. As she lifted her face to thank him, Tobias silenced her with a kiss. No matter what happened, she was determined to never betray his trust again.

A/N: Next up the scene Harry saw when he blundered into Snape's suppressed memories.

Offers, Opposition and Opportunities

Chapter 4 of 4

Five years later, Eileen and Tobias are forced to make some decisions about Severus's future.

A/N: The end is near! Soon the wonderful Rowling will unleash her new canon on the fandom and render many of our fics AU. I'm just glad I was able to finish this story before that happened.

Thanks to verity and cecelle for making sure this was ready for posting.

Chapter 4: Offers, Opposition and Opportunities

It was a bright spring afternoon, and Eileen and five-year-old Severus were re-potting plants on the back step. The young woman looked out over the tiny patch of grass that passed as a garden behind their house. A set of sheets and some well-worn clothes were drying on the line. Her mind was divided between her small son and the ever-growing list of chores that were waiting for her inside. Once again, the old temptation to take out her wand and have all of her work completed rose up within her. She shook it off, remembering what she had promised Tobias all those years ago. Life had been difficult these last few years, but she didn't regret her decision to abandon her magic.

A few months after Severus had been born, the mill had closed, leaving the skeleton crew that had remained there unemployed. All they'd had left had been the house, the clothes on their backs, and each other. Times had been difficult until Tobias had found a post several hours away in another factory. Now he left well before first light on Monday morning and stayed away all week, returning late on Saturday night. They had hoped to save up enough money to move the family to the new town, but every time they had almost been able to do so, some unexpected disaster had wiped out their meager savings. It was a lonely life for Eileen and her son, but she did her best to make it as pleasant as possible.

Just before his second birthday, Severus had begun to show signs of magic. Eileen thought back over the odd bits of magic her son had managed over the years: objects that had been on the highest shelves ending up on the floor or in his cot... things breaking during his temper tantrums... broken toys suddenly mended... Severus standing on the top of the clothesline post with no obvious indication as to how he had gotten up there.... Her son was definitely not a Squib. Surprisingly enough, Tobias seemed to have had prepared himself for the eventuality and had accepted his son's abilities. He never encouraged their son's magic, but he never denied the boy attention or affection.

The one thing that saddened her was Severus being an only child. Tears filled her eyes at the memory of the baby that had arrived three months early and stillborn last spring. Eileen had been told she would be unable to have another child, and so far that had been the case. The problem was likely something that could have been corrected with a potion or a charm, but with their circumstances such as they were, it would have been too much for them to add onto the family. She had made the difficult decision not to burden her husband with the knowledge that magic could possibly enable her to have more children. Brushing at her eyes, she smiled down at her son. It was pointless to dwell on what would never be.

"Is this right, Mam?" Severus asked, patting soil around the roots of the rosemary bush. He looked up at her, seeking confirmation and approval.

She checked his work. "Very well done, Severus. Would you like one of the biscuits we baked yesterday as a reward?"

"Yes, please!"

"Very well. Then we need to get supper ready." Chores could wait; her son was more important. "Do you think you can do the other two by yourself if I take the plants out of the old pots for you?"

He nodded. She loved his willingness to work and appreciated that he was a quick learner. She freed the other plants from their too-small pots and indicated that he should finish the task. "Now, remember not to eat the dirt."

"I'm big now. Only babies eat dirt," he replied, a shadow crossing over his face. He was offended by the reminder.

"That's my bright young man."

Eileen stepped into the tiny, spotless kitchen, took two biscuits from the stoneware jar on the counter, and placed them on a napkin. She decided to give him a glass of milk as well. As she was reaching for a glass, there was a knock at the door. It was only Friday, too early for Tobias to be home, and he never knocked anyway. Maybe it was one of the neighbors coming to visit.

Heading to the front door, Eileen wiped her hands on her apron and smoothed her hair. She opened the door, and her heart stopped at the sight of a tall, thin, black-haired man in a navy blue and silver cloak, standing on the front step. William Prince was one person she had hoped to never see again.

Slam the door in his face! her mind ordered. Before she had time to comply, his hand was on the edge of the door, and his wand was barely visible under the edge of his sleeve.

"My dear sister, aren't you going to invite me into your ... home?" William Prince asked in an overly-pleasant voice. Her brother's black eyes surveyed her critically. Why would he be calling on her? He had made it abundantly clear that he no longer considered her part of the family.

Eileen stepped aside and warily eyed her brother, wishing that she had her wand on her person instead of it being safely tucked away in the deep recesses of her blanket chest. Not that she was any match for him, but it would have been a comfort for her to at least attempt to defend herself. "What do you want, William?"

He crossed the threshold and continued to smile at her. "I was hoping for a warmer greeting. It's been such a long time since we've seen each other. More than five years, not counting father's funeral, I believe."

You should know exactly how long it's been, she thought, reining in her emotions. He had pointedly ignored her at their father's funeral. She had hoped he would continue to do so for the rest of her life.

"I thought you wanted nothing more to do with me," she said, not taking her eyes from his sharp-featured face. "Once more, William, what do you want?"

"On the contrary, I very much want to see you....and my nephew." He looked around the small, orderly sitting room. "Where is the Muggle?"

"My husband is at work," she answered, not wanting him to know that the job was hours away. "And why--after five years--do you want to be bothered with us?"

"I'm here at Mother's request."

Eileen felt her face blanch. If her mother was ill... "Is she well?"

"Reasonably speaking," William reassured her as he looked around the room. "She is, however, very concerned about the welfare of her grandson.... as am I."

"Severus is well and healthy. Now leave."

"Not until I have explained the reason for my visit." William's eyes rested on a piece of paper that was on the small table beside the armchair. He picked up a childish pencil drawing of a man, a woman, and a little boy, who were all smiling and holding hands. "I have come to offer to pay for the boy's educational expenses. You obviously didn't marry the Muggle for his money, and my nephew's education shall not be forced to suffer because of it."

"I cannot accept your offer," she answered, almost defiantly. "Severus might not be going to Hogwarts."

"Not go to Hogwarts? That is unthinkable!" William exclaimed. As if a sudden realization had come to him, he backed away in disgust. "So, he is a Squib after all, then?"

"No, Severus is a wizard, and Tobias is fully aware of the fact. We haven't told Severus yet, or decided whether or not to send him to Hogwarts. I gave up magic for the sake of my son and my marriage." The day Tobias had discovered that she was a witch was still fresh in her mind. "I didn't have much choice after Tobias had the truth thrown in his face--"

"I would have taken you in had the Muggle decided to abandon you."

Eileen knew her brother never did anything out of the kindness of his heart; such an action would be contrary to his mercenary nature. "What makes you so certain I would have accepted your offer?"

"You would have had no choice but to accept," he scoffed. "Would you have tried to raise the boy alone in some boarding house in the Alley? Would you have tried to sell yourself to those vile Muggles you obviously crave?"

"Anything would have been better than being in your debt, William. You would never do anything for anyone unless you had something to gain." She indicated the door. "Now get out of my house."

The pleasant mask slipped at her words. "He is the last male Prince, Eileen. He must go to Hogwarts, and I am prepared to make certain that happens."

"He's not your son," Eileen pointed out. "Severus doesn't even know he is a wizard, and I promised his father I would keep it that way unless it was an absolute necessity to tell him. He will go to school here as long as possible. With a little luck and some hard work, perhaps he will be able to go to--"

Eileen stumbled as she was struck with a hex that knocked her to the floor and made the room darken and blur around her. Slowly her vision cleared, and her brother's livid face came into focus. She realized that she had pushed his strained tolerance to its breaking point.

"You are a fool, Eileen!" he shouted, yanking her to her feet and shaking her in fury. "Mother and Father may have been willing to tolerate your foolishness, but I refuse to allow the Prince line to vanish because of your stupidity! You will permit me to take Severus as my heir and ward, or an unfortunate *accident* will ensure that he must be taken in by the family."

He shoved her to her knees and drew his wand. Eileen cowered in fear, her face turned pale at the threat she was positive her brother would carry out. If he wanted to kill her and take Severus, she would be defenseless to do anything to stop him. A flurry of movement in the doorway between the sitting room and the kitchen caught her eye. Severus had slipped into the house, most likely attracted by the shouting.

"Stop! Don't hurt my mam!" cried her son's shrill voice.

William instinctively tracked his wand toward the sound. Eileen, fearing for the child's safety, screamed. Severus ran to the false shelter of the nearest corner. William

snarled, "I didn't want it to be like this. I came to you with a polite offer, but you...as always...had to be difficult."

When he took a few steps closer to Severus, the child screamed and huddled in the corner, his pale face streaked with dirt and tears.

"Leave him alone!" Eileen scrambled to her feet and ran to scoop up her son. She dried his tears with the edge of her apron.

William stopped where he was, a fleeting look of regret on his face as he stared at his nephew.

"It's all right, Severus," she said, trying to calm him. "Are...are you all finished with the plants?"

He nodded, his black eyes staring warily at the tall man, who moments ago had been shouting at his mother. "Who is he, Mam?"

"He's your Uncle William, my brother." She turned to stare down her brother, her words firm in spite of the fact that she was trembling inside. "He's not going to hurt us, and there will be no more shouting."

"I give you my word as a gentleman," William answered. He knelt on the floor; his cloak and robe settled around him. He extended his hand to the quivering boy and forced a smile. "I haven't seen you since you were a baby, young man. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance."

The little boy's eyes flicked in his mother's direction, awaiting her approval. Eileen nodded. Severus timidly shook the large, smooth hand. She watched as William took in every detail of the boy's face. Eileen knew he was thinking how much the child took after the Prince side of the family. The only characteristics he seemed to have inherited from Tobias were his thin, wiry build, a deep loyalty to loved ones, and a strict sense of honor.

"Severus, I would like you to go upstairs, wash up, and go to your room until I call you," Eileen ordered her son, in the same tone that she used when she and Tobias needed to discuss a matter they would rather not have him overhear. The little boy looked reluctant to comply. "I will be fine. I promise. Now, please, go and do as you have been told."

With a wary glance at his uncle, Severus headed towards the staircase and slowly made his way to the upper floor.

William's expression became grave as soon as the child was out of earshot. "Consider my offer, Eileen. There is more at stake here than you will ever know. Severus needs to learn how to control his abilities in order to avoid any accidents. A Muggle wouldn't stand a chance if Severus were to inadvertently use his powers in fear or anger."

A memory of a window shattering during one of the boy's temper tantrums, when he had been furious about having to take a nap, came to mind. After that, she had informed her husband of the risks of raising a magical child. "I will speak with his father about the matter."

"His aunt and I would like to have him spend part of the summer holidays with us, in order to get to know him better, and also to better acquaint him with wizarding culture." He stopped her before she could protest. "Eileen, I will not have a Prince go to Hogwarts knowing little more than the average Mud...Muggle-born. He needs to learn about his heritage; it would be unfair of you not to have him prepared."

Eileen squeezed her eyes shut. If William wanted to take him away from her, it would be so easy to do it during one of the visits. He had probably made changes to the wards since their father had died. A Fidelius Charm would ensure that she could never find her son. The words slipped from her mouth before she could stop them. "I don't trust you."

"Eileen, I give you my word that I will not take him from you as long as you cooperate. Her brother hesitated. "I would be willing to make an Unbreakable Vow to convince you."

William was willing to risk his life to reassure her? Surely he had come here with an idea of what she would make him promise? Eileen pointed out the obvious. "We have no one to act as a Bonder."

"Severus could do it."

"He's just a child!" Eileen protested angrily.

"Don't be ridiculous! All he needs to do is hold the damn wand; there are no incantations to speak."

"We can't use either of our wands. The Bonder must be a third party, or the spell won't work," she reminded him.

William looked at her steadily. "I brought Father's old wand. He wanted his grandson to have it, at least until he was eleven and ready to have one of his own."

Eileen was trapped. She either had to allow her son to witness an act of magic that would require a lot of explanation, or take William at his word...such as it was. As always, he had come into the situation and exacted complete control. He had taken a gamble that she wouldn't permit the boy to see a sliver of the world that awaited him. Tempted as she was to call his bluff, she didn't dare do it. What if something went wrong during the spell? What if William decided to take the opportunity to snatch Severus away from her? She couldn't risk it.

Clearing her throat, she whispered, "I will take you on your word as a gentleman, William. The Vow will be unnecessary."

"A very prudent choice, Eileen." Her brother took a small striped bag from his pocket. "May I give this to Severus? It's only some sweets, so there is nothing to worry about. Oh, very well." William opened the bag, took out one of the sweets and popped it into his mouth. "Satisfied? I wouldn't harm the boy, Eileen."

The more she thought about it, the less plausible the idea of him harming Severus became. No, she was certain William would gain nothing from eliminating the last male heir in the Prince family. He would do him no ill, if for no other reason than that their mother would be furious with him.

"Would you care to stay and eat with us, William? It's nothing elaborate, but it would give you a chance to spend some time with Severus." Eileen stood quietly, not caring if he took her offer or not. If he stayed, perhaps she could gain some insight as to what he really wanted. If he declined... well, she actually would find that preferable.

"Unfortunately I need to return to work. I will allow you to inform the Muggle of my proposed arrangement. No doubt you will be able to convince him to comply." He handed her the small bag and said in a stiff tone, "I will send an owl Sunday evening to fetch your response to my offer. Believe me when I say I am doing this with the boy's best interests at heart."

"What if Tobias does not wish it?"

William fingered the wand in his hand, the significance of the gesture was not lost on Eileen. "I will trust you to find a way to persuade him. I would hate for my intervention to be required. Enjoy your afternoon, Eileen."

With a muffled pop, William left his sister standing awkwardly in the middle of the room. She covered her face with her hands. There would be no choice on their part, after all. Eileen had to convince Tobias that this was the best thing for Severus, or risk something terrible happening to him. Would she be forced to use magic against her husband to keep him safe? Eileen straightened up. There was nothing to do but make Tobias see that this was a wonderful opportunity for their son. If he could reconcile what she was with his beliefs and forgive her omissions five years ago, then this was within the realm of possible as well.

Eileen crept up the stairs and watched Severus from the doorway to his room. The boy was stretched out on his bed, lying on his stomach, paging through a storybook. She listened to his voice as he read the familiar words and painstakingly tried to sound out some of the longer ones.

She closed her eyes, deep in thought. He was a bright child, but in the Muggle world his options were limited. Here, he was the son of a factory worker and would be expected to follow in his father's footsteps. With their current status, affording Severus the chance to complete secondary school would be difficult, and having him attend a university was nearly out of the question. But in the wizarding world, with the backing of her family, he could complete school and then work for Gringotts, become a Healer at St. Mungo's, or even work for the Ministry. The possibilities were much broader. More opportunities... that was something Tobias could understand; that was something that they both wanted for their son.

"What's that in your hand, Mam?" Severus asked, bringing her back to the here and now.

She glanced down at the striped bag. "Uncle William wanted to give this to you. It's some sweets. Would you like one?"

"Before supper?" There was a delighted look of astonishment on his narrow face.

"Consider it a treat for being such an excellent helper for the day." She smiled and took a piece first. "We both have earned a treat."

Even though she had tested it personally, Eileen still held her breath when Severus took a piece of candy from the bag and sucked on it in obvious delight. After he finished it, he asked, "Uncle went home?"

"Yes, he did," his mother answered distractedly.

"How?"

"What do you mean, Severus?"

"Well, I was watching from the window, and I didn't see him leave." The little boy wrinkled his forehead. "And why was he wearing a long dress?"

The child's remark caught her off guard, and she couldn't suppress a nervous laugh at his innocent observation. "Severus, I promise to explain everything to you, but I need to talk about it with your father first."

He gave her a sulky stare, but knew better than to push her further. Eileen rubbed her temples. This was going to be far more difficult than she had ever thought it would be. She switched to her favorite tactic: change the subject. "We still need to take down the wash and put it away. Then we need to make you something to eat."

Severus closed his book and slid off of his bed, mumbling, "Yes, Mam."

I'm so sorry, Severus, she thought, watching him walk away with his shoulders slumped, but this is how it needs to be for now.

The next night, after she and Tobias had tucked Severus in for the night, and they were readying themselves for an early turn-in. Tobias was standing beside the bed in his nightshirt, and she was sitting on her side of the bed, brushing her hair, when Eileen reluctantly brought up the dreaded subject. There were other things she wanted to do on his first night home, but she had decided to get this issue resolved as quickly as possible. Taking a deep breath, she spoke in an overly-casual tone. "Tobias, I wanted to wait until we could talk privately. My brother was here Friday afternoon; he wants to help send Severus to school. A wizarding school."

"William was here?" Tobias asked, clearly perturbed by the news. "I thought you had agreed to give up that other life."

"I have been true to my word, but you agreed, after we discovered that Severus had developed a magical ability, it would be in his best interests for him to learn how to use it properly. My brother is offering us the opportunity to do so...without my having to break my promise to you. Hogwarts is the only school close to us," Eileen said, putting her hairbrush on the table, before sliding under the blankets.

"But what about our plans to send him to university?" Tobias asked in a loud whisper, turning off the light and joining her in the bed. "I have no intention of ever giving up on that."

"Tobias," she said, turning toward him. "I know how hard you are trying to get this family back on its feet after all of our struggles, but even if we did manage to scrape together enough money to send him on to university, there is no guarantee that he would be able to find employment." She slid her hand into his. "I just don't think that it will be possible for us to ever afford it."

"I don't like the idea of my son traveling around in a wagon, reading palms for a living," he answered.

Eileen caught herself just before a giggle escaped her lips. "Oh, Tobias, it wouldn't be anything like that! There are legitimate occupations in the wizarding world. Severus could go into banking or medicine or government. He could take up magical animal husbandry, or he could become a skilled craftsman. There are plenty of opportunities for him."

Tobias was silent, slowly absorbing what he had just heard. Eileen studied his face. There was the same look of despairing resignation that had been there the first time he had seen his son do a bit of precocious magic. He seemed to know he was facing the inevitable. His son was a wizard, and there was nothing he could do to change it. "Do I have time to think about this?"

"William needs to know by Sunday evening if we plan on accepting his assistance. He's going to send an owl to fetch our reply."

"Why so soon?" Tobias asked, sitting up suddenly. "You've told me the school doesn't take kids until the September after they turn eleven."

This was the part of the bargain she half-wished didn't exist. Eileen forced herself into an exaggerated state of calm as she delivered the next bit of news. "My family would like Severus to visit them so that he can be exposed to wizarding life."

"Surely you don't trust your brother that much? They're more like strangers than family."

"It's a part of my brother's conditions. Don't worry, I would go with him and make sure he was safe." She let a soft sigh escape her lips. "It's the only way I'll agree to it."

"Bastard," Tobias said, putting hatred into the single syllable. "He's one of the few people I hope to see rotting in Hell. I suppose we don't really have a choice in the matter, do we?" Eileen held her tongue as he clenched his hand into a fist. "He avoids you all this time only to force himself into our lives when it suits him. Why can't he just leave us the hell alone?"

"Tobias!" Eileen was horrified by his reaction. She didn't expect him to be excited about the offer, but she hadn't been prepared for him to become unhinged like this.

He snapped, "Do you have any idea how damn helpless I feel? I do my best to raise Severus to be a good person, and your brother is seeking to undo it."

"You are not helpless. You have always influenced Severus for the better. He has a strong sense of loyalty and good self-control because of you. It makes all the difference for his future." Eileen reached up to touch her husband's face and discovered frustrated tears leaking from the corners of his eyes. "The headmaster and the government don't promote the use of anything evil. Severus will learn how to defend himself against things like that."

"I love you and Severus, but there are times I wonder if it would have been better if I had left you to your family." The words were spoken so quietly that Eileen wondered if he had meant only think them.

She threw her arms around him. "Tobias, don't ever say things like that!"

He pulled her closer and continued as if he hadn't heard her at all. "Sometimes I have nightmares of what will happen to him once he learns of your world. I have dreams about him kneeling before the red-eyed Devil himself. Sometimes, in these dreams, Severus is so full of hatred and violence, I don't even recognize him. The thought of him going to a school that will teach him how to do these things..."

Eileen felt a sudden surge of exasperation at his comment. She was tired of him not fully getting it through his head that magic in and of itself was not evil. "Just because he learns what it is doesn't mean it's promoted by the school," she countered. "The Church teaches what idol worship, adultery, and taking the Lord's name in vain are, but they certainly don't encourage it. It's no different from him learning what a vice is during a catechism lesson."

"But we both know that once you know what a sin is, you tend to commit them more often."

"Which is all the more reason for you to be part of his life." She soothingly ran her hand over his chest. "Whatever we must face; I want us to face it together. I don't like the thought of him doing harm, which is why I want him to learn how to properly use his abilities. Severus is the last Prince heir; it could simply be that my brother doesn't want to see the family line end with his daughters."

Tobias kissed her. "What are you going to tell Severus?"

"The truth. He should know at least what he is and why he can do the things he can do." She returned the kiss, lingering slightly on her husband's lips. "I want us to tell him together."

In the darkness Tobias and Eileen held each other, determined to face an uncertain future together. It was just another storm to weather, and they would surely do so.

A/N: I wanted at least one of my stories to be completed before the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The story will be continued from Severus's point of view in a new story called *Meant to Be... Enemies?*, which will be coming soon.