

Bleak Night

by Jenwryn

Snape family fiction. Told from the POV of Severus's father and set a little time before Severus is born. We know Severus had a lousy childhood, but why? Who was to blame? I can't help but think nothing is ever as simple as it seems...

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Cause nature has a funny way

Of breaking what does not bend."

~ Jewel, *Innocence Maintained*.

[Late 1959]

Toby Snape sits at the kitchen table and watches his wife with an oddly closed look upon his work-worn face. She's not a beautiful woman, he can admit that. In fact she's strangely sallow, as though she never gets enough sun. *Which is true an' all*. And as she stirs the stew she's cooking, there's a bitter turn to her face. No, she's not beautiful, but she's his, and in the past he's punched blokes out for having had the hide to criticise her in his hearing. But now – now he opens his third bottle of beer, observes as her back stiffens at the sound, and, angry, Toby tips it back and drinks deep.

He can see her backbone now that she stands there with every inch of her leaking disapproval. She's too thin, much too thin, except for her belly, which swells out in front of her with a generous curve beneath the long, loose dress she wears. The dress is a kind of compromise between a witch's robes and a regular woman's clothes; a compromise left over from the days when their marriage had been full of happy compromises.

Times have changed. Toby was one of sixty-odd men laid off from his job at the mill with a pittance and a pitiful excuse, despite the long haul that he and the others in the union had put in. Probably, actually, it was his status as a vocal unionist that got his name put on the lay-off list in the first place, but he can't feel remorse about that. He's a man with morals and a strict sense of his place in the world... but it hasn't been easy since. He's working weekends and night shifts and anything else he can get his hard hands on, but they're still doing it tough. The baby... the baby picked a poor time to arrive, conceived just before the threads of their life fell apart. Fell apart – and their marriage with it.

Eileen barely lets him touch her now. She flinches away from him or, worse, remains beneath his hands but as still and as unresponsive as a corpse. She blames him for the child, she says it's his fault, and maybe it is. Toby had been so desperate for a kid. He'd watched all his mates with their sons, and the sight had made him hungry. Toby comes from a big family, and Eileen's an only child; he supposes she just doesn't understand.

And now she has that sour look on her face and her hair, once so lovely, falls unwashed around her face like lank black curtains, and it makes him want to scream or shout or shake her. Why'd she have to lock herself away from him? Why'd she have to use those tunnelled eyes of hers like a wall between them? Why'd she have to get so cold?

He'd made the error of suggesting that when the baby came she could apply for the welfare. *It's not much*, he'd said, *and I don't much like the thought neither, but when times are hard, you have to bend*. She'd snarled back that she'd rather break, and in the heated argument that had followed, Toby had realised for the first time that his wife had no intention of registering the child with the regular authorities – that she had no intention of registering this child with the regular authorities – that she had no intention of sending it to a regular school – that she had no intention of letting it be anything other than a witch or a wizard. *My son won't be a Muggle*, she'd hissed with black-lit pride.

They'd still been close enough at that point for her to back-peddle a second later and cry out that she hadn't meant it like that, but there are some things you can't take back, some harsh words that cannot be erased.

And so Toby Snape sits and watches her almost unseeing, looks at the shape of the child – a son, then, she'd said – growing inside her. The child, the son, that will never belong to the world that Toby loves and holds so dear in the secret places of his heart. A son, the son of his dreams... The son he'll never teach to ride a bike, the son he'll never take to the footie on Saturdays, the son he'll never pull apart an old car with while their faces laugh beneath the flickering light of the bare bulb of the garage, grease on their faces like war paint. The son he'll never see enter the mill like he had, or perhaps even graduate, destined to do bigger things with the life that Toby would have worked his fingers to the bone to provide him with.

This son will never be his. Oh, she'd made that perfectly clear.

Toby swings his dirty work boots up onto a chair despite the fact that he knows she hates it, or perhaps exactly for that reason, trying to force some reaction out of her, trying to goad her into acknowledging that he still exists, that he still has some role in her life, that he still has some place in her heart. She just stirs the stew. With a bitter little curl of his lips, Toby opens up another bottle of beer, sending the cap flying out the open backdoor and into the bleak night beyond.

Toby Snape has been cuckolded by the wizarding world.