

The Prodigal Son

by zhangers

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The Prodigal Son

It was past midnight and Spinner's End was silent as a grave. The great black chimney was outlined starkly against the overcast sky and stood spectre vigil over the cramped rows of dark, dilapidated houses. Not a creature stirred.

Tobias Snape couldn't sleep despite the silence. Or perhaps because of it.

The woman snored unless you pushed her onto her side, and the boy stayed up all hours, slamming books and rustling papers and god knows what else he did up there. By rights he should be sleeping like a log without the two of them, but he'd not slept more than four hours a night since they disappeared.

They were selfish, the pair of them, and always had been. They looked down on him, he was sure they did, and they had no right to. Who was it breaking their back all week earning their bread? Who was it does all the bills and 'Muggle stuff' as she called it. By rights it was woman's work but she never lifted a finger to it. She sat in that library of hers all day, reading her books with her chemistry set whatsit and writing all those papers.

It wasn't proper work and it didn't bring them anything. And the boy was just the same. Never got a job ever. Just sat up in his room playing magic tricks and eating all the food off his table. Or ran off after girls all day. He'd got his first job when he was twelve but the woman wouldn't hear of the boy earning his keep. 'Severus is a wizard and a Prince he's not getting some worthless Muggle job', she'd said. Well, he showed her what was what. They lived off his 'worthless Muggle job' and while he was master of the house he wasn't going to stand for that. But in the end it was all for nought. She was tough, he'd give her that. A beating like that would've cowed his own ma. Eileen might've screamed like a hellcat but the boy didn't get that job after all.

When she ran off his guv gave him an earful for being 'too bloody soft on the stuck-up bint'. And he was right. Right from the start she had him by the balls. Writing 'Severus' on the certificate before he could get a word in and teaching the boy herself instead of letting him go to school for proper, normal learning. The way she acted, like she was some great catch and he was lucky to get her. Truth of the matter was, she'd been the one to chase after him. Some ugly, mopey cow she'd been, at least five

years older than him, hanging around the shop all the time giving him eyes. He'd been a bit of an alright when he was a lad and he could've had any of one of them. But a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. She was cheap to keep, obedient besides, and didn't have any parents to poke their nose in. Soon enough she was pregnant and that was that.

She'd never told him what she was until the kid was born. After that it was seventeen years of being second class in his own house. She couldn't cook, she couldn't sew and she didn't end up being so well-trained after all. His parents weren't any good about it. 'Can't have a divorce disgrace the Snape name,' they said. 'Best get your wife in hand, son', they said. Well how was he supposed to do that? Nothing could bring the two of them down off their pedestal, not even the back of his hand. And the law was on their side, too. He had the police over once to give him a warning a warning for disciplining his own wife and kids! They never heard when she threatened to kill him with a wave of her magic wand.

So in the end he lost it all. The boy never came back from his fancy school this year and the woman didn't have any reason to stay after that. He'd come home to find she'd vanished with all their things that he'd bought for them and not so much as a note. Gone god knows where. Maybe gone home to her parents, wherever that was and whoever they were. Or maybe gone to find the boy.

That was in June and it was almost October now. They weren't coming back and that was a fact. He didn't care, really. He didn't need them. He might even get himself a new bird he wasn't past it yet and the house needed keeping.

Tobias would've have been quite happy to lie brooding on his ill luck all night, if it weren't for sound of someone coming in the front door.

Eileen was his immediate thought and for a moment he felt something. But then he heard the footsteps boots against wood and it didn't sound like Eileen's footsteps. *A burglar?* He rolled onto his side and grabbed the crow bar from under his bed. Eileen had mocked him for putting one there, saying something about 'warding spells', but who's laughing now! With impressive stealth for a man his size, he eased his bedroom door open and stole down the dark stairs.

The intruder was clumping about in the library. He could hear him clear as day and the light was seeping out from under the door. He paused with his ear pressed against it. The intruder was looking for loot, creaking cabinets and draws open left, right and centre. Tobias turned the door handle silently and at the count of three threw it open.

"Stop where you are!" He yelled. Almost as soon as he'd opened his mouth he felt the crowbar tear up out of his hand. It flew across the room in a graceful arc and was caught deftly by his son.

"YOU!" he boomed. He couldn't think of a more unwelcome sight in the dead of the night.

Severus hadn't improved in the year since he'd last seen him. He was another inch taller, had grown his hair into a disgusting ponytail and was wearing one of those long black things *they* wore and which he'd banned from his house.

"Me," replied Severus in that insolent way Eileen had taught him. They thought he was too stupid to hear it, but he could.

"Where've you been?" He had a right to know he was the boy's father after all. Someone had to keep him in line and teach him what's right and wrong, since his mother wouldn't do it.

"Away. With *my kind*. Doing what *we* do."

"Then what are you doing back here, boy? Why didn't you stay there with them instead of crawling back here like vermin? I don't want you here! You can fuck off where you came from."

"I'm looking for you. And my stuff."

"She took your stuff when she bolted." The boy looked surprised, but if he felt anything else he didn't show it. Hard and cold as stone, were Eileen and Severus, with not a bit of heart in them.

"I don't know where she went, so don't ask."

"I didn't expect you to." There it was again. Such a mouth the boy had these days.

"Take care. Don't think you're too grown up for a bit of discipline."

"Is that a threat?"

There was something in his son's tone that made him hesitate. He looked at him really looked at him and saw that something wasn't right. There was a gauntness about him that wasn't just growing pains and he looked as though he slept even less than Tobias himself. But it was the wildness in his son's eyes that worried him most. He thought he'd beaten that reckless rage out of him years ago, and yet there it was, a mad fire glittering in his black, soulless eyes. There were other details too. The way his lips twitched, the way his hand trembled as he held his magic stick, the way he kept pulling down the sleeve of his left arm.

Tobias's eyes widened. This was beyond his worst fears.

"Show me your arm!"

He made a lunge, but the boy pointed the stick directly at him, red sparks flying off the end.

"Stay where you are."

"Show me your arm! NOW!" he repeated. The boy was trying to hide it behind his back now. He'd hit the nail on the head.

"Why?" said Severus, a little too sharply.

"I know who you've been with. I should've known you'd wind up there eventually. They're druggies, these new friends of yours, aren't they?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Severus laughed. It was a cruel one, full of mockery and disdain.

"They are, aren't they? Admit it! I should've known. Look at you all long-haired, hippie-loving nonces, the lot of you. Mixing up pots of god knows what and loafing off us regular, working folk. You're going to feel my belt tonight, boy, mark my word. I didn't raise my son to be a bleedin' druggie!"

"You didn't raise me at all." It was barely a whisper.

"What did you say to me?"

"I said, you didn't raise me at all. A Muggle couldn't raise me. I'm a Prince."

"You've done it now! Come here---" He started to remove his belt. He was going to make good his promise. He hadn't belted the boy in years and clearly he was missing it.

"No."

"RIGHT!" He went for the boy, to clout him on the sweet spot on the head that wouldn't show to busybodies, magic wand be damned...

The boy made a violent jabbing motion with the stick. Tobias froze like an absurd musical statue, and then fell. The side of his head clipped the table as he went down but he couldn't lift a finger to help himself couldn't move at all from where he'd landed, fist outstretched, staring up at the demented face of his son. There was a look of vindictive delight on the boy's features like he'd never seen before, and something else that he couldn't even put a name to.

Father and son stared at each other for a long time, the distance between them thick with words neither could say.

Then Severus raised the wand again and took careful aim. His never once broke his father's gaze, never once even blinked.

For a split second Tobias knew what was really wrong with his son what he'd sensed since first seeing him.

Severus Snape wasn't a little boy to be bullied anymore.

Then there was a flash of green light.

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Author's Notes :

Hopefully something a little different. All reviews and criticisms are very welcome - particularly grammar picks!

I'm also looking for a Beta to help me with a novel-length AU HG/SS. If you don't mind reading a longer fic and correcting dialogue grammar, please let me know.

-Zhangs