

After The Rain

by Gemini Sister

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Severus Snape was bored.

During his third year at Hogwarts, he'd almost forgotten how it felt to be back at home for the summer holidays. Many of his fellow Slytherins would be living it up at some exotic holiday destination whilst Severus sat on his creaky bed in his dingy home, rain lashing down the stone walls of the old and weathered Spinner's End.

Huffing like an old man, Severus got up and leaned his elbows on the windowsill, resting his chin against his fists. The view... Well, there was no view. Only dilapidated slate roofs and chimneys scattered with drunken television aerials. Squishing his nose against the windowpane, he could see the chimney stacks of the mill where his father worked. But today was Sunday, and unfortunately for him, his father was at home. Rubbing the area on his back which still smarted from his father's leather belt, grim reality set in.

Severus had earned the strap yesterday afternoon after his father returned from half a day's work with pay-in-hand, his breath reeking of beer and cigarettes. As Tobias Snape barged into the small kitchenette and demanded food, Severus shot him a dark glare of annoyance which did not go unnoticed.

The mill-worker's lunch of pie and beans had been ready and waiting since one o'clock, ruined from keeping it warm in the oven. Tobias barely seemed to notice as he ate it up and downed a mug of tar-like tea – just the way he liked it.

His pay packet was already open as he threw it across the table towards his wife. He had taken out what he deemed his dues for booze and ciggies. The paltry remainder was Eileen's housekeeping money. Cowed after years of such treatment, she thought nothing of it anymore, turning her head away.

Severus, however, had been away at school for most of the year, forgetting how to behave at home. Instinctively, he spoke up in defence of his mother, and instantly regretted his outburst when the buckle of his father's belt bit through his thin smock-like shirt.

A succession of slaps and loud oaths from his father had guided Severus upstairs to his bedroom, the door bolting shut from the outside.

Today, feeling bored and hungry, Severus remembered the delicious and plentiful food served in the Great Hall at Hogwarts. His stomach growled; it too had forgotten what it was like to go hungry.

After being stuck in his room since the previous day with only a chamber pot under his bed, his woeful home and the comfort of Hogwarts did not compare. The rain here

seemed harsher, his bedroom full of cold drafts, and even though it was July, everything felt like winter.

On Sundays at school, Severus could be found nestled somewhere outdoors, reading a book. At Spinner's End, his school trunk had been hurled into the loft, safely locked away by his father who didn't want his son and wife to have access to magical paraphernalia. Without his wand, Severus felt naked.

But there was one thing in common between home and school: his father's and the Marauder's bullying were the bane of his life. At the age of eleven, he had hoped going to Hogwarts would free him from needless beatings and verbal abuse, learning magic which would keep both him and his mother safe. How wrong he had been.

Shaking his head in disappointment, he pressed his forehead against the cool glass pane, feeling its soothing touch. Tears fell from his eyes, mirroring the tracks of raindrops trickling down the window.

When he opened his eyes again, a sparkle of sunshine danced through the wet windowpane, and a wobbly smile broke him out of his misery. The sun peeked through grey clouds and the rain stopped. Severus wondered if there might be a rainbow somewhere in the sky; he'd seen his first one ever at Hogwarts, but he didn't think such things existed at Spinner's End.

Suddenly, the heavy bolt on his bedroom door pulled free. Holding his breath, he stood alert and ready to scramble for cover in case it was his father. Slowly, the door opened and the black-haired, lanky frame of his mother poked her head into the room.

"Come out, son, you have a visitor downstairs," she whispered.

Severus jerked in surprise; he never had visitors. Not here.

Smiling, he headed quietly out of his room, following his mother's gentle footsteps down the stairs.

Severus had only one friend, the one good thing in common between Hogwarts and home.

His friend cared enough to call around to his home to see him, and only him. After his father's beating and imprisonment, the sun had just come out for Severus.

"Lily!" he greeted her as his mother returned to the kitchen.

"Can you come out for a bit? Weather's clearing up now, and I've missed you, Sev."

The sight of Lily Evans standing on his front doorstep swept away all his grey clouds and ill feelings. Who needed swanky hotels in the sun when you had a friend like Lily Evans?

The thirteen-year-old boy offered to carry the girl's sodden umbrella as they walked down the street together. Summer had begun at last.