

Raindrops and Tears

by severed_lies

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Eileen Prince Snape felt a great deal of trepidation, coming back to this place. The rain had started pouring as soon as she had left her flat that morning, making her even more nervous about her plans. She had given up her rights to be there, she knew, but driven by guilt and sadness, she forced herself to cross the threshold.

Eileen hung her sodden cloak on a peg by the front door in the ramshackle house on Spinner's End. She decided, first of all, to put on the kettle and have a cuppa to ward off the chill gathered from walking in the downpour. In a daze, she was unaware of the rainwater dripping from the cloak, pooling in ever decreasing rivulets, winding from underneath the garment to the threadbare rug that covered the better part of the floor in the front parlor.

When she crossed into the kitchen, Eileen felt along the wall for the light switch. Flipping the switch, she was startled to find the electricity was still working. That meant that someone had been paying the utility rates for all of the years that the house had been unoccupied. This mystery warranted further investigation, but that investigation would keep for another day.

After dropping her battered carry-all on the worn table, Eileen picked up the worn kettle from the stove top. It took a minute or two to get the water to run clear from the disused pipes, and then she rinsed out the kettle until she felt it was clean enough to use. After filling the kettle, she walked back to the ancient cooker and turned on the burner. The gas, too, was still connected.

As she waited for the water to come to a boil, Eileen turned around to gaze through the mud-streaked window above the sink. The mid-day, March sun was obscured by the dark and roiling clouds. Watching as the rain beat against the weathered pane, she wondered when the torrents would cease. The side yard, which had been well kept when she had occupied this dreary house, many years before, had become a disheartening jumble of weeds and brambles.

The whistling of the teakettle sounded its alert for a full minute before Eileen reached to take it off the stove. She automatically shifted through the motions of rinsing out the teapot, draining it, then filling the bottom with a few remaining pinches of tea that had been left in the cupboard and then pouring in the hot water. Grabbing a chipped, brown mug, she set the teapot on the wobbly table and sat heavily on the only chair in the room.

Eileen placed her chin in one hand while pouring the tea with the other. Her eyes were drawn to the latest issue of the *Daily Prophet* that was peeking out of her bag. The front page headline and a blurry photo of the most vilified Death Eater had alerted her to his impending release. The article, describing Severus Snape as one of the Darkest wizards of the age and murderer of the great Albus Dumbledore, concluded that he had no right to be released back into proper society after only ten years of incarceration.

Eileen thought about her dear Severus and tried to imagine his reaction to her presence in this house. After all, she had spent the last thirty years in hiding, and she had

not seen him since the day he became a Death Eater. Abandoning her son had been the hardest of the many ordeals she endured while in exile. She may not have been able to dissuade him from joining Tom Riddle, but she was determined to support him as he began his life anew.

The rain continued throughout the afternoon, and Eileen sat at the table, lost in remembrance of her life in this small house. She had cherished the years before Severus had left to attend Hogwarts, teaching him about magic and relishing his aptitude for potions. He had done well in his studies, despite the callous treatment he had endured from his peers.

A clap of thunder brought Eileen back to the present. She had no idea of when Severus was to be returned to this house. According to the scant information she had received to her inquiry at the Ministry, he would be escorted by Aurors from Azkaban to Spinner's End before midnight.

The chair made a scraping noise against the floor as she pushed it from the table to stand. Shaking her head at the now-cold tea, Eileen took the mug to the sink and poured out the contents.

Walking from the kitchen to enter the parlor, Eileen noticed that her cloak had made a puddle on the floor. Sighing, she bypassed the worn armchair near the door in favor of the ragged sofa. After carefully sitting at the corner nearest the fireplace, she reached over to light the oil lamp that was sitting alone on a spindly table. The weak and sputtering light did nothing to dispel the gloom of the late afternoon. She shuddered as the thunder continued, the reverberations rattling the old windows in their frames.

Logs and kindling were stacked neatly in the hearth, but instead of igniting the wood, her attention was drawn to the bookshelves that lined the room. She recalled the many afternoons that she and Severus used to spend reading about the wonders of the Wizarding world. Unlike most children, Severus would save his knuts and pence to buy books, eschewing sugary treats for knowledge of his mother's legacy.

Now, the once laden shelves were bare and coated with layers of dust. Eileen surmised that the Ministry must have taken all of their precious books after searching the humble house following Severus' arrest. It was jarring to wonder what had become of their precious tomes.

Curious as to the state of the rest of the house, Eileen spent some time that afternoon wandering from room to room. She was numbed by the disarray she found everywhere. The wallpaper was peeling, the draperies were moth-eaten, and the floors were in need of polishing and waxing.

Eileen cast a few cleaning charms on the floors and walls, knowing that it would take more than a desultory effort to make the place habitable. Her immediate concern was for the first floor. She freshened the bed linens and scoured the small, dingy bathroom before returning to the parlor to resume her vigil.

Several hours after dusk, the crack of Apparition startled Eileen. Wand in hand, she rose from the sofa, waiting with bated breath to see her son. Despite anticipating a negative reaction from Severus, Eileen stood with resolve, hoping that he would welcome her presence.

The front door opened with a squeak, and a young man dressed in Auror robes entered the parlor. Seeing Eileen standing in the middle of the room, he quickly pointed his wand at her and shouted, "Who are you and why are you here!"

Eileen cleared her throat and replied in a scratchy voice, "My name is Eileen Prince Snape. I am waiting for my son, Severus."

At that declaration, she heard a timid voice from just outside the door calling out, "Mum?"

The Auror already inside waved his partner in, and Eileen drank in the sight of her son. Rain dripped from the eaves, through the open door and onto the floor of the entryway.

Although the Aurors were dry, Severus was soaked to the skin and shivering in the chill of the night air. He must have been soaked the minute the boat left the prison. Merlin only knew how long he had been exposed to the elements on his journey home.

The second Auror had his wand drawn and pointed at Severus' back. The first Auror still had his wand pointed at Eileen. Mindful of the wands that were trained on her and her son, Eileen slowly dropped her own wand, pushing it under the scarred coffee table, then held out her arms, hands unclenched and empty.

The second Auror prodded Severus in the shoulder with his wand, maneuvering her son's back to the wall just inside of the door. Eileen held her tongue, not wanting to cause further retribution. Although she had prepared herself for the condition Severus would be in, knowing that Azkaban was a harsh and unforgiving place, she held back a sob. That he had not been properly fed was to be expected. His despondency and lack of awareness was troubling.

The first Auror reached out with his left leg to slam the door shut as the second Auror manhandled Severus. Eileen remained silent as she watched the rough treatment of her son. Severus was unresponsive as he submitted to the tracking device being fastened over his too thin wrist. The device, a leather band with a pulsing, red cabochon affixed to it, was cinched tightly over the faded Dark Mark on his emaciated arm.

The second Auror grunted after he attached the device and again prodded Severus with his wand, barking out, "You know the terms of your release, scum, and we will be watching your every move. It won't take much to get you back to the place you belong."

With his threat delivered, he nodded to his partner, and they filed out of the hallway, slamming the door shut in their wake.

She looked into his eyes. That vacant stare was heartbreaking. Before Eileen could make it across the floor, Severus slid down the wall, his rain-soaked cloak leaving a slimy, dirty trail down the battered plaster. She knelt down and Accio'd her wand. Casting drying and warming charms, she watched his eyes as they slowly came into focus.

"Mum?" he said weakly. "No, I... No, must not give in, they cannot make me... not real, not..."

Eileen tried to smile. She had not expected a warm welcome, and she had no idea what to do to make Severus believe she was here in the flesh. Smiling was not something that came naturally to either of them, and this house had the capacity to drive happiness away, as if the structure were anchored by Dementors.

"Severus," she said calmly, "Mum is here. We must get you off the wet floor."

It took a few seconds for Severus to realize that there was a chair just in front of him. He tilted his head up to look at Eileen, and she watched as he slowly pulled his hands up and looked at his sleeves.

"Not wet anymore," he said slowly, eyes widening at the sight of the glowing red crystal. He turned his wrist, looking at the tracking device. As if he were coming awake from a nightmare, he jerked and scrambled away from Eileen. She gasped as he backed into the door, eyes darting back to her face, then to the floor.

"Severus!" she cried. "You are home, safe at home."

"No!" he moaned, trying desperately to get up on his feet. He could not summon enough strength to stand, and then, to Eileen's surprise, his panic slowly faded.

"You are at home. They cannot harm you now," she said, trying to keep him calm.

Severus closed his eyes tightly, the pale skin underneath stretched so taught that the dark smudges looked more like bruises.

Eileen, unable to reason with her son in his state, walked into the kitchen and, with a swish of her wand, reheated the teapot and filled the used mug. She returned to the hall and placed the mug a few feet away from her cowering son.

"You should drink the tea, Severus," she said.

Walking back a few steps, Eileen waited for some response. After an interminable length of time, Severus opened his eyes. She could see that those dark eyes were again unfocused.

As if she were cajoling a child to take nourishment, she again repeated softly, "Drink the tea. You must be chilled."

Again, he began to focus and looked up at her. As a child, one never could win a staring match with the boy, but now he backed down from her gaze and closed his eyes again. Eileen was unable to leave him sitting in the corner.

The puddles left from her cloak and the rain that had dripped off Severus while he was still soaked wicked back up into his borrowed cloak. Eileen would not be able to make up for all of the hurt and pain she caused her son in the past, but he needed her now, and she needed to get him off the cold floor.

Eileen lifted her wand and whispered, "*Stupefy*." Severus was out cold, and his head drooped towards his chest. She moved the mug to the coffee table and stared at Severus for a while. Shaking her head, she said, "*Mobilicorpus*," then walked up the stairs with her inert son, tears streaming down her face.