

Hilltop Chronicles

by neelix

A series of one-shots set in the world of Hilltop Cottage.

Donovan's Bear

Chapter 1 of 3

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A/N: This is the first installment of the Hilltop Chronicles, written for my own benefit, because I cannot seem to leave this world behind. Each story will be a one-shot. Please let me know your thoughts.

Many, many thanks to ARo for the beta. Huge hug, honey. You know why.

Donovan's Bear

The house in Spinner's End was dark and cold. The last of the coal had been used the night before, and Eileen Snape pulled her woollen cardigan tighter around her thin frame as she padded in stocking feet up the dimly-lit stairs to check on Severus.

He was restless in his cot. The blankets she had tucked around him had been kicked away, and he started to rub his eyes and whimper softly as she pushed open the creaky door. The boy's room was freezing, and not for the first time. Eileen wished that she still had her wand. A Warming Charm would have soon settled the boy, but Tobias had put an end to that when he snapped her wand in two during a particularly heated row. Pushing the memory to one side, she put the blankets back snugly and stroked Severus' pale cheek, humming 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' softly to him. His straight, black hair clung to his round face like a cap, and she gently mussed it with her fingertips. Her heart was torn as she looked down at his now sleeping form, and with a tinge of guilt, she hoped that he would grow up to be a Squib.

The front door opened and slammed shut below them, the whole house reverberating from the force. As Eileen stiffened and turned to leave the room, her toe caught something below the cot. It was the teddy she had bought for Severus just after he was born, and now, at ten months, he had started to throw it about for fun. Truth be told, it was his only toy, and he dragged it about with him wherever he went.

She lifted the bear quickly and dropped it at the foot of the cot so that Severus would find it when he woke and closed the door softly behind her as she left the room.

Severus was five. He sat in his room, huddled in the corner at the end of his bed with his chin on his knees. He had stopped crying a while ago, but his dirty face still bore the tracks of his tears. He rubbed his nose on the sleeve of his jumper and tried to shut out the noises from downstairs.

Daddy was angry again, and Mummy had been shaking when she told him to go to his room. He didn't want to go. Mummy was scared, and he wanted to stay with her. But she would have been angry with him then, so he ran up the stairs as fast as he could. He heard Mummy telling Daddy that she had dropped the plate, but it wasn't her at all. Severus didn't know why the plate had broken. He just wanted it, and it had flown towards him without him knowing why.

Daddy was still shouting, but Severus couldn't hear his mother now. He was frightened. Reaching out a thin arm, he grabbed his teddy, Albert, and wrapped his arms

around him tightly, burying his wet eyes into his soft, furry body.

Severus was nine years old, and he had a wand of his very own. He was careful to hide it whenever his father was in the house, and Mother had made him swear that he would never practice his magic when his father was home, or in front of any other children. Mother had a new wand, too, and she kept it under her mattress. Sometimes, when Severus was at school and his father was working, he knew that Mother used her wand to help her with the cleaning. He never saw her using it, but he could feel it.

Severus was lying on his bed, lazily moving his wand around in slow circles. Above him, just below the ceiling, Albert the bear was flying like Batman. Severus had used an old handkerchief to make him a cape, and it flared out behind him as he moved him round and round with his wand.

Severus thought it would be brilliant to fly like Albert one day.

Severus was seventeen. His father had just died, and for the first time in a very long time, he felt almost happy. He was home for the funeral, which meant he had a break from school and chance to spend some time with Mother.

He stood in front of the mirror on the inside of his wardrobe door and straightened his robes. They were too big. He thought he looked a bit like a bat. As he closed the door, his eye was drawn to a cardboard box that sat on top of the wardrobe, covered in a thin layer of dust. He pulled the box down and sat on the bed to open it.

Albert stared one-eyed at him from the box. Mother must have put him in there. She had even made a bed for him out of one of Severus' old jumpers. He smirked and rolled his eyes before replacing the lid and throwing the box back where he had found it.

He glanced briefly around the room and grimaced. God, he hated this house and this room in particular. Suddenly he couldn't wait to go back to school. Lucius had promised to introduce him to Tom. Things would be different then. He'd make sure Mother didn't have to live in this dump, that's for sure.

Severus felt like he was going to be sick. He stood on the rug in the front room of the house, watching as people moved around him as if in slow-motion. The woman from the local shop had brought milk and tea. Mrs Bennett, Mother's only friend, fussed about, plumping cushions and casting sympathetic glances in his direction. There were other people, shadowy, hazy figures he could barely acknowledge through the fog.

The tattoo on his arm throbbed. It always did, but right now it was just a dull ache.

Mother was dead, and he only felt the wrenching pain of her loss and the deep desire to tell everyone to fuck off and leave him alone.

He didn't know how long he had stood in the middle of the room on his own, but the silence eventually seeped through his grief, and he realised then that everyone had left. He hadn't spoken to anyone.

He didn't know what to do, so he did what he had always done and trudged, unseeing, up the stairs and along the hallway to his bedroom. He sat on his bed, which was far too small for him, and still didn't know what to do. Like the pricking of small needles, memories of his childhood flashed before him, drawing fresh blood. Anger bubbled up inside him, and unconsciously, he withdrew his wand and put the force of all of his grief behind the hexes that he shot around the room, not aiming, not seeing, just feeling with an intensity that felt powerful and frightening all at the same time.

Shards of wood and glass splintered around him. His wardrobe was no more. He shielded himself as the debris flew his way, and then he sank to his knees and grabbed what was left of his only childhood friend. The bear was in pieces, and an anguished sob finally broke free from Severus' throat.

Albert looked pathetic. One of his legs had gone, his head was hanging on by a thread, and most of his stuffing was floating about the room, vying with the bits of sawdust and dust motes for airspace.

Later, Severus sat on the floor of his room, calmer now but still surrounded by broken furniture, and he slowly stitched Albert back together. It was what Mother would have done.

Severus was older and wiser now. He pulled his jumper smoothly over his head, shaking his black hair loose as he checked his reflection. His stomach was full of butterflies and anticipation, and for the umpteenth time that evening, the face of his son swam in front of his vision.

He had a son now. The sense of awe and responsibility settled onto his shoulders, and it felt comfortable and exciting at the same time. He would make sure that Donovan's childhood was as far removed from his own as possible. There would be laughter, love, and tactile affection. There would be magic, lots of magic, and plenty of foolish (but safe) wand-waving. He would buy him a broom, there was room in the garden behind Hilltop Cottage and it was safe enough as long as he didn't fly too high. He would decorate his bedroom in bright, cheerful colours and encourage him to love books as much as his mother.

One last look in the mirror and he shrugged. There wasn't much he could do to improve the image that he saw, but he had a feeling Hermione wasn't much interested in looks anyway.

Hermione. His heart clenched. He still loved her, although he had yet to tell her.

Slowly, Severus. Don't jump the gun. It's still early days. Who knows where this is going, really? But there is hope, certainly.

As an afterthought, Severus went into his old room and lifted his old teddy bear from his resting place on top of the wardrobe. Deciding that Albert also deserved a second chance, he shrank him and slipped him into the pocket of his jeans.

'Shhhh,' Severus whispered. Donovan's hands clasped the front of his jumper tightly as his sobs slowly abated, and Severus kissed his forehead gently before sitting him in his cot and searching for a change of clothes.

Immediately, Donovan stood up in the cot, his dark eyes unblinking as he stared back up at the man who was his Daddy. He was too young to understand, but when he was older, Severus would tell him everything.

'You know, Lexie is very kind to you, Donovan. You will have to learn to control where you throw your food in future,' Severus murmured, arching an eyebrow at his child.

Donovan giggled as Severus removed his dirty t-shirt and joggers, and he jumped into his arms as he lifted him to get his playful legs inside his pyjama bottoms. He was very close to Severus' face, and he explored the large nose and dark hair with his hands before planting a soppy kiss on his lips.

Severus was stunned. Tears started to fill his eyes as he held his son against his chest, and they threatened to spill until Donovan giggled again. Severus chuckled with him and planted a kiss on his cheek.

'Amazing,' he murmured. 'Here. I have a gift for you,' he said seriously. With one hand, he fumbled in his pocket and pulled out the tiny bear. He placed it in the cot, withdrew his wand and transformed Albert to his normal size. Immediately, Donovan stretched to grab him, and Severus lifted the bear for him to reach. Donovan grabbed

him by his arm and smiled happily.

'This is Albert,' Severus whispered, fighting to stop the lump in his throat.

"Bert..." Donovan repeated.

'If you like,' Severus smiled. 'Come on. Let's go and find your mother.'

They were entwined in her bed once again. Finally. Severus felt his heartbeat return to its usual rhythm and his breathing slowed, and he extracted himself from between her legs, slick and sticky from sweat and other bodily fluids.

She pulled him back, not wanting him to leave her side so soon, and he smiled down at her before bending to capture her lips with his.

'Missed you,' he said quietly.

Hermione giggled. 'I noticed.'

'I'll show you again, if you like,' he said suggestively, then stifled a yawn.

Hermione laughed loudly. 'Maybe you should have a snooze and recover, first?'

'You've killed me with your insatiable appetites,' he moaned, flopping exhausted onto the pillows beside her.

'Severus, even the most virile of men couldn't go more than four times in one night,' she insisted.

'Aha. So you admit I am still a sex-god, then?' he teased.

'I'll admit that if you tell me about that horrid bear,' she mused.

Damn. He was hoping she had forgotten about it.

'The bear?' He wondered if he could stall her, and his hand drifted to her exposed breast and pert, pebbled nipple. She batted him away.

'Don't change the subject,' she said with a smile in her voice. 'The bear. Now.'

'It was a toy my mother bought for me. It's been sitting in a box for years. I just thought Donovan might like it,' he said blandly.

'Is he special? The bear, I mean?' Hermione propped herself on her elbow in order to see his face.

'Not really. He's just a bear,' Severus said quietly.

Hermione knew he was lying, but she said nothing.

The house was fully of people. Donovan sat on the bottom step and observed as Mummy ran to the door and let even more people in. He was waiting for Megan, his friend from school. There were other children playing in the garden already. Uncle Harry and Auntie Ginny were already here and Nana Minerva. She had come by Floo, and as soon as she saw him, she had scooped him up for a hug and planted a dry kiss on his cheek. He didn't mind, because she had brought him a birthday present, but Daddy wouldn't let him open it until everyone was here.

The doorbell went again.

'Donovan, that's Megan. Do you want to let her in?' Mummy was now in the kitchen, giving out drinks.

He leapt from the step to the front door in one jump and grinned from ear to ear as he saw Megan on the doorstep. She was holding a present out to him gravely, and in her other hand, she was holding her teddy bear. It looked quite new and it had pink fur. Donovan was disappointed. Megan had told him her bear was lovely, but it just looked girly.

A cough behind him alerted him to the presence of Daddy, and he turned around with wide eyes.

'Donovan, invite your guest inside. Never leave people on the doorstep unless they are your enemy,' Severus chided.

'Yes, Daddy,' he said with a smirk. He knew what an enemy was, Daddy had explained it once. Megan was not an enemy, so he invited her in.

Severus watched as Donovan led the curly-haired girl through and into the garden and shook his head. Why he had agreed to this, he had no idea. He caught Hermione's amused glance and shrugged. He was about to go and find a drink when Donovan ran, panting, back into the house.

'Daddy!' he shouted in panic. 'I forgot Bert!'

Severus held his hand up, and Donovan stopped dead in his tracks. 'No running in the house, remember?' he said softly, tousling Donovan's silky black hair. 'Go and save him a seat. I'll get him.'

Severus walked into the crowded garden carrying his precious cargo and handed him solemnly to Donovan, who placed him on the chair between himself and Megan at the table.

Harry walked over to him and handed him a beer. 'Hard to believe he's four already, isn't it?' He nodded in Donovan's direction.

'Hmm,' Severus murmured before taking a drink.

'This was his idea, was it?' Harry said, with a hint of amusement in his voice.

'Actually, no. I thought that a Teddy Bears' picnic was an ideal way to celebrate my son's fourth birthday, and he seemed to agree,' Severus replied flatly.

Harry looked at Severus and for a brief moment thought he was serious. Then he let out a huge guffaw, slapping Severus on his shoulder.

Hermione walked from the house, carrying a large cake with four candles burning merrily on top. Severus was immediately at her side.

'You shouldn't be carrying anything this heavy,' he berated her.

'Don't be silly, Severus. I'm only three months gone; it won't do me any harm.' Hermione let him take the cake anyway and gave Ginny a rueful smile.

'He's going to be impossible, isn't he?' Ginny laughed.

'He already is.' She sighed.

A baritone voice started to sing Happy Birthday, and for a brief moment, Severus sang solo and everyone stared at him before joining in. Afterwards, Severus cut the cake; and no-one said a word as he handed two paper plates to Donovan, one for his son...

... And one for the bear.

The End

Donovan's Sister

Chapter 2 of 3

A series of one-shots set in the world of Hilltop Cottage.

Getting pregnant again hadn't been a conscious decision on Hermione's part. She wrinkled her nose ruefully getting pregnant with Donovan hadn't been part of the plan either, come to think of it, but she had learned to be grateful for little accidents.

She rested her hand gently on her flat stomach and peered at her flawless skin in the mirror over the sink. She wondered what it meant for a woman to 'glow' during pregnancy. She could see no difference, except for perhaps a new sparkle in her eye.

She lifted up the only Muggle device she knew that dispensed its own magic and smiled at the matching blue lines that told her what she had already suspected. She decided to wait until Donovan was in bed before telling Severus so that they could savour the moment as a couple. The older her son became, the less time they seemed to have together, so tonight, she decided to make it special.

Severus dug his spade in deeper, grunting with effort as he turned over yet another lump of solid earth. He broke up the dirt with the sharp edge of the blade, crumbling it into workable loam, before moving along the row and starting the process again.

Anything to take his mind off things.

Hermione had been distracted of late, and while he no longer jumped to wrong conclusions and assumed she was being unfaithful, he missed the closeness they usually shared. He didn't envy her the career she was successfully carving out, nor did he mind being what Harry amusingly called her 'House Husband'. He loved being at home, looking after the house and garden and spending time with Donovan. But he missed his wife. Not to mention that they hadn't made love in over a week. Severus frowned and thrust the spade downwards with relish.

He paused and wiped his brow, catching sight of Donovan as he came out of the house wearing his wellington boots, one trouser leg tucked in and one hanging loose. Severus grinned as he put his hands into the pockets of his jeans and marched towards him, looking like a miniature farmer on his way to work.

'Can I help you, Daddy?' Donovan squinted up at Severus, the sun glaring in his eyes.

Severus knelt down to eye level. 'That all depends,' he mused, ruffling Donovan's dark hair. 'Did you help tidy up the toys at school yesterday?'

'Yes I did. Megan helped, too,' he said with a small smile. Severus narrowed his eyes.

'Megan picked up all of the toys, didn't she?' he asked slowly.

'Yes. But I showed her where to put them.' Donovan looked a little smug.

Severus fought hard not to smirk. 'Better than using your magic at school, I suppose.'

'Last time wasn't my fault,' Donovan said with a pout. 'I didn't mean to make the clock go faster. Story time was boring. You tell much better stories than Miss Wilson.'

Severus smiled then. When Donovan was older, he would realise that some of the stories were not just fairytales, but there was time enough for that. The choice for Donovan to grow up in a mostly Muggle world had been a conscious one, to give him a more balanced view by the time he went to Hogwarts. Hermione was already convinced that Donovan would be placed in Slytherin, and old habits died hard where some pure-blood families were concerned.

'Come and help me pull up some carrots,' Severus said eventually. He stood and held out his hand, and Donovan took it, holding on firmly as father and son walked across to the vegetable patch.

Hermione stood at the kitchen door and smiled affectionately as Donovan walked back to the house with Severus. He looked every inch a little man in his own right, and she marvelled at how much alike they were, even to the way they straightened stiffly when irked for some reason or other.

'Can we play Hungry Hippos after tea?' Donovan asked as he pushed off his wellingtons.

Hermione looked up and caught Severus's gaze with a rueful smirk. 'Maybe tomorrow. I think we all need an early night tonight, Donovan.'

Severus raised his eyebrows and twitched his mouth into a hopeful smile. He hoped that meant what he thought it did. Hermione grinned and shook her head. 'Later,' she mouthed.

'Make sure Daddy gives you his wand so that he can't cheat.' Donovan turned and gave Severus a glare, which made Hermione giggle.

'He's got you there,' she said with a laugh.

Severus rolled his eyes and lifted Donovan's jacket from the floor where he'd let it fall. 'I wasn't cheating,' he murmured for Hermione's ears only. 'I was expediting the

proceedings.' Severus loved being with Donovan, but he hated Hungry Hippos with a passion usually reserved for dunderheads and other such low-life.

'I've made Donovan's tea, but I thought we could wait and eat together later. Is that okay?' She took the soil-covered carrots that Severus handed to her, and he followed her into the kitchen.

'Is everything alright?' he asked quietly, watching her face closely for clues.

'Everything is fine.' Hermione dumped the carrots in the sink and then returned to hug Severus gingerly. She wrinkled her nose. 'Except that you smell.'

'That's honest sweat, wench. I'll have my shower now while Donovan eats. You're sure everything is fine?' He looked down into her warm eyes with concern. Hermione smiled warmly and kissed him firmly on his smooth, soft lips.

'I promise. I'll get Donovan's tea into him while you shower.'

Hermione watched as Severus walked towards the stairs, pausing briefly to hug Donovan on the way. Her heart felt suddenly full, and she brushed away sentimental tears.

Hermione had barely touched her wine. Severus watched as she fiddled with the stem of her glass, the pale liquid swirling but never touching her lips. They hadn't spoken much, and Hermione had only picked at her steak, while Severus had devoured his. Gardening always made him ravenous. He lifted his own glass and drained it, then pushed his empty plate away with a contented sigh.

'That was excellent,' he said quietly.

'Thanks.' Hermione made to stand, but Severus stopped her with his hand on her arm.

'Stop pussyfooting around, Hermione. Sit down and spit it out, then perhaps we can enjoy the rest of the night without me sitting here on tenterhooks waiting for the other shoe to drop.' Severus stared at Hermione earnestly, and she had the good grace to blush.

He was absolutely right. Of course. She had been waiting for the right moment, but in the meantime she hadn't been able to relax, her thoughts veering from the excitement of her news, to concern at Severus potential reaction. She took a deep breath and smiled warily.

'Sorry,' she whispered, sliding back into her chair and deciding to ignore the detritus around her. 'There is something I've been meaning to say.'

'I know,' Severus said with exasperation. 'I didn't think you would allow me to avoid Hungry Hippos for no reason.'

Hermione laughed at that, and the tension lifted. Severus took her hand in his and stroked her fingers gently. 'Well?'

Hermione looked into his dark eyes and swallowed the lump in her throat quickly.

'We're pregnant,' she whispered.

Severus mouth fell open and his eyes widened in surprise. Whatever he'd been expecting her to say, it certainly wasn't this.

'We are?' he asked, and a smile he couldn't fight spread across his face.

Hermione nodded, tears in her eyes, and they both started to laugh.

The fire was slowly dying, but they were still lying on the rug, their legs twined around each other after they had made love ever so carefully. Hermione had protested that they wouldn't harm the baby, but Severus wasn't as confident. He gazed into the embers, still in awe at their change in circumstance.

Hermione was dozing against his shoulder. Her breath huffed out, causing the curls of her fringe to flutter softly. Severus smiled and adjusted his position to wrap his arm around her, holding her closer as she rested her head against his chest.

'Love you,' she mumbled.

'I know,' he replied. 'Bed, I think.'

Hermione opened her eyes and smiled up at him sleepily. 'Happy?' she asked him.

'Always,' he whispered.

The following evening, Donovan was sat between his parents on the large sofa. They had just told him about the new baby. When Megan's mummy had her baby, she had been really fat, but his mother's stomach wasn't fat at all. He wondered if witches were different.

'You're not fat, Mummy,' he stated.

'Not yet. I will be when the baby gets bigger,' Hermione said.

'Will the baby come to my birthday party?' he asked, seriously. He wanted to sit next to Megan, not his new sibling.

Severus chuckled. 'The baby won't be here for a long time yet.'

'Okay. Now can we play Hungry Hippos?' he said with frustration.

Severus looked aghast from Donovan to a sweetly smiling Hermione and knew he was cornered.

The day after Donovan's fourth birthday party, Hermione and Severus stood on the small landing of Hilltop Cottage and pondered where to put a third bedroom. Severus had strong views about magically expanded rooms and the risks that came with them, hence the brick-built extension that housed his potions laboratory. He was even more insistent that the same principles should be applied when making space for the new baby.

'What about extending over the top of the lab?' Hermione mused, worrying her bottom lip in thought.

'Not safe,' he muttered. 'I rarely use volatile ingredients now, but we don't know where Donovan's interests may lie in the future. It's not worth the risk.'

Hermione nodded in agreement, and cast her eyes upwards.

'The attic, then,' she said with a resigned tone.

'Not keen, are you?' Severus grinned at her.

'I don't like the thought of the baby being up there and not just across the hallway.'

'I've already thought of that. Let's brave it, shall we?' With a flick of his wand, the wooden hatch opened, revealing cobwebs and draughty darkness above them. Hermione shivered. 'I suppose you want me to go first?'

Hermione nodded firmly and watched in awe as Severus levitated himself up through the hatch and sat himself on the edge. Casting 'Lumos', Severus gazed around the attic and let out a low whistle. The space covered the whole top floor of the house, and the angled pitch of the roof meant it was large and roomy on one side and narrower at the other. They would need to put a couple of windows in, but the space would make a great bedroom once it was boarded out and decorated. Apart from a couple of old packing cases in the corner of the room, and the families of spiders that had obviously made themselves at home for years, the room was empty. They could have the whole place done in no time.

'Well?' Hermione called up to him.

Severus let himself drift back down and looked at Hermione's worried face. 'It's fine. I'll have some work to do, but it won't take me long.'

'Is it big enough for a nursery?' she wondered aloud.

'Too big, I think. But it's big enough for a four year old with far too many toys.' He grinned as the penny dropped and Hermione smiled up at him.

'I love you,' she said, tipping her face upwards for a kiss.

Severus kissed her, gently at first and then deeper. Hermione didn't object when he shuffled them awkwardly into their own room and closed the door.

The sun was just setting over the roof of Hilltop Cottage, and Hermione lay on her bed watching from the window as the soft, orange glow dipped behind the hills in the distance.

The baby moved a foot, and she rubbed her stomach softly to ease the discomfort. She felt as big as a whale, her ankles were swollen and she was overdue by four days. Severus had insisted she stay in bed and rest and had provided her with a substantial pile of books. She had read over half of the stack already, and now she was bored and restless. Not to mention her back was aching. She reached for her wand tentatively. The last time she had called Severus he had charged into the room like a bull, thinking she had gone into labour. She made sure her message was clearer this time, and her Patronus gambolled down the stairs quickly.

She didn't have to wait long before Severus came into the room, followed by an ever-inquisitive Donovan, who ran and jumped onto the foot of the bed with a grin.

'Gently, Donovan,' Severus admonished. Secretly, he was glad of his son's enthusiasm for the new baby and only hoped it would last when the child finally arrived. 'Are you quite well?' he asked Hermione.

'I could do with a back rub, and perhaps a glass of water,' she sighed, shifting herself in the bed.

'Donovan, please go to the kitchen and get some water for your mother,' Severus instructed.

'Can't you use your wand, Daddy?' Donovan looked up at him with pleading eyes.

'The water won't be cold enough. Do as I ask, please,' Severus insisted.

Donovan looked to his mother for support, and she grinned at him in amusement. 'You heard your Daddy, Donovan. I promise you won't miss anything,' she said with a laugh.

As Donovan left the room, slowly, Hermione took Severus' hand in hers. 'He's like your shadow at the moment, isn't he?' She smiled.

Severus sat beside her and kissed her softly. 'How are you feeling?'

'My lower back aches. I think I should get up and walk a bit.'

Severus pulled back the covers and helped Hermione onto her feet. As she stood, she felt a gentle dragging in her abdomen and her waters broke with a gush. At that moment, Donovan walked back into the room, carrying a half-full glass of water. He stared as a pool of water appeared at Hermione's feet and stared at his parents as they looked at him in shock.

'Daddy! Mummy wet herself!'

In the early hours of the morning, before the sun started to rise again, Hermione Snape gave birth to her second child, a girl with a mop of tight, black curls and a little snub nose. Severus stayed by her side the whole time and Donovan stayed with Auntie Ginny and Uncle Harry.

Later that day, a steady stream of visitors arrived at St. Mungo's to welcome the new baby. Donovan stood guard by his sister's cot, telling everyone to be quiet because Ciara was sleeping.

Severus looked at Hermione with a smirk, and Hermione wondered just when Donovan had perfected the Snape glare.

The End

Baby Makes Four

Chapter 3 of 3

A series of one-shots set in the world of Hilltop Cottage.

Severus watched in awe as his daughter was born. He knew what to expect, because he had watched Hermione's memories of Donovan's birth. But being there and watching a miracle was totally different. Nothing could have prepared him for the emotions that bombarded him during and after the birth. His heart was so full, and yet he longed for sleep and perhaps a Firewhisky and a bit of a cry to himself.

Hermione had been amazing. Where she had found the strength to push their daughter into the world, he would never know. Her curls were plastered around her face, sweat pouring from her through sheer exertion, but as soon as she heard her baby cry, she beamed from ear to ear and told Severus she loved him, much to the amusement of the nursing staff.

A girl. He hadn't quite considered that having a daughter would feel different to having a son. He instantly wanted to protect her and cosset her, and yet she wasn't a fragile thing at all. At eight pounds and two ounces, she was a pudding of a baby, cuddly, with a round face, black curly hair and, thank the gods, Hermione's delicate nose. He cradled her close, marvelling at her soft skin and perfect, tiny fingers and inhaling her clean, intoxicating scent. Her eyes remained closed until he caressed her cheek with his finger tip, and when she finally looked up at her father for the first time with soft, blue eyes, Severus couldn't contain his emotions any longer.

Hermione started to cry as she watched Severus with their baby, his tears falling quietly as he gazed at Ciara.

'Severus,' she whispered, choking on his name through her own tears. 'Come here.'

He sat, and she gently took Ciara from him and held her with one arm. With the other, she pulled Severus close, and they kissed over and over again, their tears mingling, until he gave an embarrassed laugh. Hermione held his face with her hand briefly and their eyes met, each of them overwhelmed with joy and the shared burden of parenthood.

Donovan stood in the doorway of his parents' bedroom and watched. A Moses basket was sitting on its own stand in pride of place beside the bed, and his sister Ciara was sleeping inside, her hands curled around the soft, jersey fabric of her sleep suit. It wasn't the basket Donovan was looking at, however.

His father was sitting on the bed next to his mother, his arm draped around her shoulders, and they were both looking down lovingly at their new baby. It made Donovan's tummy feel funny.

'Daddy,' he said from the doorway. There was no response, and so he tried again.

'Daddy!'

Hermione glanced in Donovan's direction. 'We won't be long, Donovan. Why don't you go and play for a while?'

Donovan glared and started to feel angry. He stamped his foot in frustration and sparks flew as his magic began to build. He looked from his mother to his father and then at the Moses basket, and irrational anger towards his sister flared suddenly. With no conscious effort on Donovan's part, he felt himself lift from the floor and rise upwards, and he started to panic. Scrabbling with both hands, he managed to grab hold of the door lintel to stop himself from going any further, and he let out a scream.

'DADDY!'

Severus turned towards the sound and gasped as he saw Donovan's legs dangling in the doorway.

'Fuck,' he muttered, withdrawing his wand quickly.

'Oh my god!' Hermione shouted in shock.

'Don't panic, I have him.' Severus slowly levitated Donovan to floor and pulled the now sobbing boy into a bear hug, stroking his hair soothingly. Hermione went to where they stood and kissed the top of Donovan's head before looking pointedly at Severus. He gave a rueful shrug.

'I think he wanted some attention, don't you?'

Severus stepped through the Floo, his precious package wrapped in brown paper under his arm.

'Well?' Hermione stood in the kitchen doorway, cradling Ciara over her shoulder.

'It cost an arm and a leg,' Severus sighed.

'Well, you could have borrowed one, Severus.'

Hermione stepped towards him and kissed Severus on his frowning mouth. She knew very well why Severus didn't want to use Albus' Pensieve, so she decided not to labour the point.

'Let's see it then, now you've bought something that will likely become a Snape family heirloom.' Hermione smiled fondly as their eyes met, and Severus finally stopped frowning and allowed himself to relax.

'We'll have to find somewhere safe to put it. I wouldn't want Donovan getting carried away with it when he gets older,' he murmured as he shrugged off his dark coat and hung it on the end of the banister.

Hermione wisely said nothing. The fact that her husband's life had been intrinsically shaped for good and bad by the use of a Pensieve had not gone unnoticed, by her at least. The emotional ties to the Pensieve in what was now Minerva's office were obviously still so strong that he couldn't bring himself to use it.

Severus slowly lifted the heavy bowl from its wrappings and laid it in the centre of the kitchen table. Instantly, Hermione could see why it had cost so much money, for it was carved from a gleaming block of black marble. The outer edges were scribed with runes, some giving warnings about the use of the object, and some extolling the virtues of its use. It was incredibly beautiful, and as far removed from the look of Albus' Pensieve as you could possibly get.

'It's beautiful, Severus.'

Severus was frowning again as he stared at the bowl. 'I hope this is a good idea,' he muttered.

Hermione shifted Ciara around and handed her to Severus. The effect was immediate. The lines on his face softened and his eyes lightened as he looked into his daughter's face. She gurgled happily, and an unconscious smile graced his lips as Ciara tried to grab his nose.

'She's looking more like you every day, isn't she?' he said with a grin.

Hermione took her wand and held her hand up to stop any protest before it started.

'You need to see this,' she stated firmly, withdrawing her most recent memory of Severus and Ciara. She let the fine, silver strand fall into the Pensieve, took Ciara out of

Severus' arms and nodded firmly.

'I don't know what you're up to, witch,' Severus grumbled, but he did as he was instructed, knowing that Hermione would get her own way eventually.

He dipped his face into the swirling silver, its colour sharply contrasting with the black of the marble, and watched as he held his daughter. It was a revelation. He had never thought that he could look so happy. Almost reluctantly, he returned to the kitchen, and Hermione immediately replaced the memory, smiling as she relived the moment again.

'That's why we're doing this. Donovan needs to know what it was like when he was a baby, or he will think we love Ciara more than him. Goodness knows what will happen with his magic the next time, and I don't fancy Obliviating the population of New Mills, do you?' She caught Severus' gaze meaningfully. There had already been some near misses.

'Point taken.' He stepped closer and bent to kiss her lightly on her pursed lips. 'Know-it-all,' he whispered, laughing as he neatly side-stepped her poorly aimed swipe.

Donovan thought the shiny, black bowl was amazing. The patterns that were carved around the edge fascinated him, and he ran his fingers across them, feeling the roughness against the smooth marble.

'What are these shapes?' he asked.

'They're called runes. When you go to Hogwarts you will learn how to read them,' Hermione said patiently.

'Can't I learn them now?' he demanded.

'I might show you how to write your name. Would you like that?' Hermione smiled. Donovan Snape might look like his father, but he was as inquisitive and as eager to learn as his mother.

'That would be cool,' he said, his eyes wide.

Severus frowned. "'Cool"?'

'Everyone says cool at school, Daddy,' Donovan said with an exaggerated sigh. 'What is the bowl for?'

'It's a bit like a television, but the pictures you watch are real,' Hermione said. 'It's magical, so you must remember not to tell Megan or your other school friends.'

'I can't see a switch. Is there a remote control?' Donovan rested his chin on his hands and peered at the underside of the bowl.

Hermione laughed lightly. 'Let's show you. Daddy will go first, and then you can do it together.'

Donovan watched in fascination as Hermione took a memory with her wand and let drop noiselessly into the Pensieve. Then Severus dipped his face into the bowl, stayed there for a few moments and then lifted his head again. He stared open-mouthed at Hermione, and they shared a meaningful look. Donovan wondered why his father's cheeks were a little bit pink, and decided to see for himself. He leaned forward and had almost touched the silver memory with the tip of his nose when Severus pulled him back.

'Not for you to see,' he said firmly, and Hermione covered her mouth with her hand as she laughed.

'Sorry, Severus. I couldn't resist,' she said.

'What can I see?' Donovan demanded petulantly. Hermione removed some more silver strands of memory, and Donovan held tightly to his fathers' hand as they entered the Pensieve together.

They were in a place Donovan didn't recognise. There was a large sofa, and a huge window that let in loads of sunlight. He could see his mother, and she was holding a baby wrapped in a white blanket.

'The baby is you,' Severus said softly, placing his hand gently on Donovan's shoulder for reassurance.

The memory of Hermione kissed baby Donovan and smiled at him. 'Mummy loves you very much, Donovan.'

Donovan looked around the room and frowned, the memory started to fade, and suddenly he was back with his father in Hilltop Cottage, in a different memory this time. He was a bit older and sitting on his father's knee. Severus was dressed in black from head to toe and looked different to the father he knew now.

'What are you wearing, Daddy?' he asked him quietly.

'Those are my teaching robes. I was working at Hogwarts when you were born.'

'Is that why Mummy was looking after me on her own in the other house?' Donovan peered up at Severus, who grimaced.

'You don't miss a thing, do you?' he murmured. 'That is a story for when you're older, I think. The important thing is this.' He pointed at the memory again, and Donovan watched as Hermione sat beside Severus, lifted Donovan and they started to talk together, baby Donovan obviously fascinated by the buttons on Severus' black jacket. Donovan wanted to hear what was being said, but the noise was just a murmuring.

'What is Mummy saying?' he said.

'We were talking about you,' Severus said in a whisper. His eyes were transfixed as he remembered the moment he was first introduced to his son. He tightened his arm around Donovan's shoulders as a lump rose in his throat. 'We were saying how much we loved you and how important you are to us,' he said with a smile.

The memory shifted again, and he watched as Severus put him to bed in his old cot. He watched as his father stoked his cheek with his finger. He had seen him do that with Ciara, but never with James Potter or baby Lily. He looked up and saw his father smiling at the memory as he watched, and he put a thin arm around Severus waist.

'I love you, Daddy,' he said.

Severus looked down at Donovan, his eyes wide and more than a little watery. 'Let's go home, shall we?'

With a slight tug, Donovan found himself back in Hilltop Cottage, his hand tightly grasping his father's. They looked at each other, and Severus bent his head and said, 'I love you too, son.'

'And Ciara?' Donovan asked, his gaze drifting to where Hermione sat cradling the baby, just as she had cradled him in the memory.

'Both of you. We love both of you. You are our children.'

It took a week or two to get into a new routine with the children, and Severus was exhausted. He had expected the tiredness associated with a newborn, but juggling feeds, laundry and bath time, not to mention the seemingly endless stream of visitors, and looking after Donovan, was quite a challenge. Added to that, Hermione had also needed some tender loving care as she recovered from childbirth. Not that he minded. He hadn't thought it possible that he could love his wife more than he already did, but each day since Ciara's birth had proved this to be wrong. He was totally in awe of her.

He was sitting on the sofa with Ciara propped in the crook of his arm and Donovan sleeping soundly against his other shoulder. It was only four in the afternoon, and yet Severus felt that he could sleep for a week. He was just closing his eyes when the Floo whooshed into life, startling Ciara awake. Donovan jump up with a surprised shout, and Ciara began to cry. Severus groaned, ready to hurl abuse at whoever had interrupted what could have quite possibly been the best forty winks of his life so far. He groaned even louder when the fuss died down to reveal the dishevelled but grinning face of Harry Potter.

'Sorry, Severus. Did I interrupt some special family time?' Harry grinned as he took in Severus' exhausted face.

'Just be glad the children are within earshot, Potter,' Severus grumbled. 'Is this a social call or did you time your visit with the particular intention of waking the household?'

Harry laughed. 'I think you'll find my timing is just right, judging by the look of you. Ginny and I thought you could use a break, so I've come to take the children for a little while, if that's ok?'

'You what?' Severus stared at Harry as if he had misheard him.

'Babysitting, Severus. You know, it's when some one else looks after your kids so you can go out, or, I don't know, maybe sleep for a while,' Harry said patiently.

'But you have your own kids,' Severus said with what he belated realised was a pathetic tone.

'Molly has them. All the time, it seems. Go on, Severus. You look bloody knackered, and I'm sure you could use some time alone with Hermione.'

That clinched it.

'Right. Donovan, gather up some of your toys to bring to Uncle Harry's house,' Severus said quickly.

'Yes!' Donovan shouted, running around the room with his arms out. 'Look, Uncle Harry, I can fly!'

'So you can,' Harry said with a laugh.

Donovan stopped mid-flight and stared seriously up at Harry. 'I can too. Daddy, tell him.'

Harry looked at Severus, who raised an eyebrow. 'Like father, like son,' he smirked. 'Uncontrolled magic at it's very worst.'

'Oh, god. He won't...' Harry made a fluttering movement with his hands.

'Just don't ignore him for too long and you'll be fine.' Severus smiled slowly as Harry paled.

'Right... Good. I'll take Ciara while you get her things together, shall I?' He reached for the still grizzling baby.

Severus paused long enough to pass a worried glance between Harry and his daughter's reddening face. Ciara had been the centre of his world since her birth, and suddenly he wasn't sure he wanted to be without her, even for an hour.

'Harry!' Hermione walked down the stairs and gave Harry a warm hug. 'What are you doing here?'

'I came to take the children for a couple of hours, give Severus a break. It doesn't look as if he wants to let go of Ciara, though,' he said softly.

Severus looked at Harry indignantly. 'I was just working out what you would need.'

'Harry, this is so kind of you.' Hermione gently took Ciara from Severus' arms and passed her to Harry with a kiss. She walked quickly around the room, throwing things into Ciara's changing bag, threw the strap over Harry's shoulder and chivvied him towards the Floo.

'Donovan, you be good and help Uncle Harry and Auntie Ginny with Ciara, won't you?'

In the space of five minutes, Harry had left with the children, leaving Severus staring non-plussed at his wife.

'Let's go to bed, Severus,' Hermione whispered, taking his hand in hers.

'You can't surely be ready for... you know?' Severus followed Hermione meekly as she led him up the stairs.

'Not really. A hug would be nice, though,' she said with a smile.

Wearily, Severus undressed and climbed into bed beside Hermione, curling his tall frame around hers and pulling her close. Nuzzling her neck was the last thing he remembered. When Severus awoke, it was dark outside and he was alone in the bed. Quickly, he went down the stairs, to find that Hermione, Donovan and Ciara were all sound asleep on the sofa.

He grunted at the irony and went to make a cup of tea.

The End