

Solitary

by labrt2004

A follow-up to Emissary. Severus experiences a moment of personal crisis.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: None of it is mine.

Author's Notes: *This one-shot piece is meant as a follow-up to my 2010 Exchange gift for Kribu, "Emissary" (also archived under this pen name here at TPP). This plot bunny attacked me and I just couldn't make him leave. It's part of the same universe as "Emissary" and is also told from David Granger's perspective. It will probably make more sense if you read "Emissary" first.*

He and I found each other, not surprisingly, by the fruit and cheese spread, the one refuge where the few other hapless blokes congregated during the baby shower. He looked terribly glum, even for him.

In the two years since I acquired him as my son-in-law, I have grown quite used to his reticent ways. He is not anti-social, precisely, but solitary. He is never the one to initiate conversations at family dinners. He always finds a reason to turn down my invitations to grab a pint at the pub. He is a man of few words and extraordinary reserve, rather too stiff for my taste, and one whom, I admit, would not have been my first choice for my Jeanie. Jane and I kept a hawk's eye on them when they were first married. We really couldn't help ourselves, you see. You would think that after raising a witch, putting her through Hogwarts, and living through the aftermath of a wizarding war, we would have learnt by now not to be too shocked by things. Yet there we were, giving our girl away to a taciturn tyrant, and for months we could barely sleep. But it was clear from the beginning that Jeanie had different opinions, and though her poor, old father would have dearly loved to believe otherwise, hers was the only opinion to matter in the end. Even Jane was impressed by the extent to which Jeanie bloomed. "Obscenely happy," was how she put it. And so, with a parental shrug, we welcomed Severus Snape to the family.

"Severus, wouldn't you rather be sharing the glory with Jeanie instead of sulking in a corner? Look how she's completely managed to enslave an entire kingdom with nappies and rattles," I said as I took a place next to my son-in-law.

He ceased glowering into his cup, turning tired eyes to me. "You cannot be serious. I refuse to participate in this vulgar Muggle custom."

I chuckled sympathetically. "Don't worry, my man. It's usually only with the first baby that one has to put up with such a fuss. Later pregnancies don't warrant such affairs, as much as we parents like to tell our children they're all equally adored."

Another round of ecstatic sighs drifted from the corner where Jeanie sat opening presents, surrounded by a devoted coterie of females. Her mother proudly passed around a bright pink miniature dress.

"I don't believe I have the capacity for another round," he muttered. "If she intends to return all the gifts, why in Merlin's name accept them?"

Having never dreamt that I'd be in a position to explain the mysteries of females, I rather surprised myself when I responded, "It's not the gifts that are important. It's the

opportunity to congregate in a massive herd and talk nonsense together. Women love to swarm...and pity the fool who tries to intervene."

"And yet, she was most insistent upon my making an appearance here."

"As you're partially responsible for her current state, you need to be shown off as much as the presents, naturally."

He rolled his eyes, evidently not soothed by my attempts at humor. But when he looked across the room, his gaze alighting on Jeanie, his sour features smoothed, and the irritated expression gave way to contemplation. As if sensing her husband's presence, Jeanie turned and met his eyes, pausing just long enough to offer a smile. Severus inclined his head to her in silent communication, lifting his glass to her in a self-mocking toast.

I watched the exchange, lightness filling my heart. Every father frets about whether their daughter will ever find a man who can read her soul from afar.

I didn't expect then to witness the curtain of unhappiness descend so quickly again upon his visage after Jeanie returned to the party. He closed his eyes, drawing a labored breath before releasing it with a slight shake of his head. Though he was a temperamentally unyielding man even on the best of days, I'd been around him long enough to see through his usual gloom.

"Severus," I said quietly concerned, "is everything all right with you?"

He was silent for a long minute, his shoulders tense, and I thought that perhaps he would tell me to bugger off. But at length, he finally replied, in slow, hard syllables and a voice raw with bleakness, "Is it possible, David, that in my quest to give your daughter every happiness she could ever desire that I've managed instead to precipitate a disaster?"

I blinked at this pronouncement. "What on earth are you talking about?"

He scowled, then put his glass down and shook his head. "It is nothing. I did not intend to sound maudlin."

Abruptly, he turned and left the parlor, but I was not about to let him escape me. Outside, I cornered him in the hallway and gripped his arm. The muted sounds of the festivities filtered through the parlor doorway as I yanked him back. If it weren't for the fact that we were likely discussing something that concerned Jeanie, I wouldn't have been so forward. "Don't think you can walk away after saying something like that. You'd better explain, especially if this pertains to my daughter."

He shook off my hand with a vicious curse, looking exhausted as he placed his forehead briefly over his fingertips. "My apologies."

Such behavior was peculiar for Severus and very alarming, but I knew that trespassing too quickly on his privacy would accomplish nothing. "Come in here," I said, gently steering him into the library.

I took a seat in my chair, leaving him to choose whether he wanted to sit as well. At the moment, he seemed intent on pacing, in what I suspected was habit for him.

"Severus, son, whatever it is, you had better tell me."

My words were met with a sharp intake of breath and a weary expression, and I realized belatedly that he was perhaps not accustomed to being addressed as anyone's son.

"Hermione and I are about to have a child," he said with unnecessary precision.

"Yes," I said agreeably, glad that he was saying *something*.

He paused and looked at me, a wild look in his eyes. "*Achild!* A helpless being put in my charge, whom I'm expected to support, guide, and protect for the next twenty years at least." His pacing resumed.

"True," I said, nodding. "It's wonderful news, Severus. You know we're thrilled for the both of you. And I know how happy Jeanie is."

"Yes," he ground out. "Hermione is *especially* pleased, and that is what has me feeling like a complete ass."

"Well, *shouldn't* she be pleased?" By now, I could easily see where this conversation would go. However, if he had anything in common with Jeanie, he would find it necessary to thoroughly torture himself before he could properly face the situation.

"She has convinced herself that I would make an adequate father. But how, may I ask, could someone who has never known a moment's worth of decent parenting, a son of a raving drunkard, possibly be a parent himself?"

This was worlds beyond the usual minor grumbling of fellows facing fatherhood; I wasn't sure I could even begin to set him to rights. "Has it ever occurred to you," I said in purposefully light tones, "that she might, having decided to marry you and all, know and accept everything already?"

"She may not be so sanguine if she knew what kind of life we were condemning this child to live," he said viciously.

"And that would be what kind of life, exactly?" I asked, genuinely curious.

At last, he stopped pacing and slowly lowered himself into the seat across from mine. I waited patiently, knowing that Severus was not a man who easily unburdened himself. "In my past, I have made certain regrettable decisions that have resulted in me spending two decades killing and maiming," he said, his tones steeped in bitterness. "I have served as a weapon yielded by one manipulative, powerful, and destructive wizard to wage battle against another manipulative, powerful, and even more destructive wizard. I have willingly engaged in soul-corrupting Dark magic for the sake of winning the war. With that for a father, what kind of future could a child of mine possibly hope for?"

"Now hold on for just one second, Severus," I interjected, holding up a hand. "It's one thing to have an unfortunate past, and it is another thing entirely if you manage to cast it behind you and move on, as you have clearly done. I see no reason to fear for my grandchild's future."

His brows furrowed, and deep worry lines creased his forehead. "That... is not what I expected you would say."

"No? I bet you didn't." My equanimity surprised even myself. Yet, I found that in spite of the unsavory details he had just revealed, my estimation of him remained high. Severus was a decent man, from whom my family has so far known nothing but honor, and I was determined that he would know the same from me. "Certainly, your misdeeds in the past mean you have a lot of things you need to figure out for today. Jeanie was never willing to fully disclose the details of your life to us. Jane and I tried our best to make inquiries, but you don't need me to tell you how bloody impossible it is for non-magical people to find out anything about you wizards. But I believe that my Jeanie is a good enough judge of character that she ought to be able to make her own decisions about you. And as far as Jane and I are concerned, we see only the courageous, honorable man whom we first met on our doorstep ten years ago."

He watched me intently as I said this, and though I found the scrutiny blasted unnerving, I allowed it, for something told me he would not believe me otherwise. His rigid demeanor suggested that he was having difficulty understanding my meaning, and in fact, my trust seemed to rattle him. "David," he said awkwardly, "this is not to imply that I am not pleased to be having a child with Hermione. I merely fear that I have judged *myself* in error."

"I *know* that," I said. "No need to explain, son. It would, on the other hand, not kill you to give yourself a little more credit," I insisted firmly.

"She acted as if I hung the moon when I agreed to start a family. Her happiness is so... inviolable to me that I find it impossible to begin any sort of meaningful conversation. Not that a conversation would necessarily be productive, as there's not much to be done at this point, is there? The child will be born, whether I am fit to be a father or not," he said harshly.

"Severus, there's not a father in the universe who becomes a parent thinking he's worthy of the role. We all come at it from the same place...hopeless, daft, stupid fools who have done an endless litany of moronic things and who are praying from the moment they first hold their offspring that they won't bollocks the whole thing up."

The line of his mouth thinned, and I could see an objection building up in the way his jaw twitched. "I suppose you'll try to tell me that you've been through it," he said with a touch of sneer.

"And I would point out that I have," I replied evenly. "My credentials may have been slightly better than yours, but not a far sight more...I at least didn't off anyone."

He raised his brow. "You pick a strange moment to jest."

"If it helps soothe your nerves, Severus. Because that's exactly what's getting to you. When Jeanie was born, I wasn't in much better shape."

His grip on the armchair relaxed marginally. "What... was your experience?" he asked with guarded interest.

"She was premature. Carrying her to term took a terrible toll on Jane, and I wanted to rip myself to pieces for putting her in that state. That wasn't to mention the terror I felt at the prospect of caring for a potentially disabled child since Jeanie could have very well been one. What the devil did I know about caring for a healthy kid, never mind a disabled one? When it turned out Jeanie and Jane were both all right, I called my mother and blubbered like a boy. So look, we all figure it out along the way."

"I do have similar crises of confidence," he confessed. "There are moments when I wonder what kind of hell I have got myself into. I often return home to find Hermione in tears for no fathomable reason. She'll beg my forgiveness and say it's the baby, which naturally I find no comfort in at all...hence my questioning the sanity of this whole proposition."

I couldn't help but laugh. "You poor old bugger. Don't lose sleep over that. It's not your fault, though it bloody well feels that way. They swear they'll never forgive you, but they can't help it, and they certainly don't mean it. Their bodies are being overrun by hormones, which makes them blasted miserable sometimes. Just hold her hand and tell her you love her."

He closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose between two fingers. "And then I wonder also whether I would have the fortitude to guide this child firmly but kindly or would I merely be the disgrace that my father was. I dare not think about how I would explain my... history when the child grows old enough to question."

I nodded. "Hard questions, with no easy answers, I'm afraid. But you somehow found a way to pull through that terrible wizarding war, didn't you? I would place my wager on you again, Severus. I know you'll sort everything out."

He looked so doubtful that I felt compelled to take his shoulder and lock gazes with him, the way I used to do with Jeanie when she was despondent. It was a moment of rare vulnerability for my stoic son-in-law. "Here is the secret, son, which I will let you in on early: when they're born...when they come out of the womb screaming their lungs out, tiny and flailing, the doctor is going to ask you to cut the cord...the second you first lay eyes on them, their little fists grabbing your shirt, your fingers shaking like crazy as you're struggling to cut the cord, you're going to decide right then and there that no matter what it takes, you'll figure out all the answers, no matter how impossible."

"I see," he murmured.

"Trust me. It will be fine."

Before he could respond, a knock sounded on the door, and Jeanie poked her head in. "Severus? Is everything all right?" She frowned at the two of us, then toddled into the room in the way only very pregnant women could. "Are you giving him a hard time again, Daddy?"

Springing from his seat, Severus went to my daughter, carefully leading her toward the door again. "No, my dearest. We were only discussing the baby."

"Civilly, I hope?" she muttered as she was ushered out.

He turned to me before exiting, casting me a look which communicated far more words than the two he actually uttered. "Thank you."

He was born on April 20th, a pleasant spring night, my first grandchild. Jeanie and Severus decided eventually to name him Julian David Snape. They took him home to their flat in Hogsmeade, where a nursery had been prepared and waiting for months. With a shrug, Jeanie transformed...or was it transfigured?...all the pink dresses she had received to blue tuxedos. They showed him off in the apothecary, where all the potioners, herbalists, and little old ladies of the realm came to pay homage.

But before all that happened, before little Julian had even opened his eyes to take his first glimpse of the world, his grandfather stood outside a delivery room and watched a doctor place him in the arms of his father. His father being a rather dignified type, it was hard to tell what he was thinking. But all it took was one look at his glittering black eyes, filled with unshed tears, and the corners of his lips lifted in a trembling smile, for one to know that all would be well.

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Reviews are much appreciated!