

A Bedtime Story

by Kailin

A short sequel to "Like Father, Like Daughter", which was a sequel to "Snape, A History"

one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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For everyone who begged for a sequel to "Like Father, Like Daughter"

A Bedtime Story

"Please, Daddy? Please read me a story?"

Severus Snape was beginning to hate those words.

It wasn't that he despaired of his three-year-old daughter turning into a bookworm like Hermione. He'd already given that up as a foregone conclusion, and besides, Severus had no shortage of books himself. His idea of a relaxing evening was when both he and Hermione were absorbed in their respective reading materials while Mairin played quietly with her toys. It was as wonderfully idyllic as his life could possibly be, Snape had decided.

Nor was it that he disapproved of Mairin's choice of books. She was only three and a half, for Merlin's sake; of course her storybooks leaned toward the inane. He didn't expect her to be perusing textbooks at her tender age. Mairin would probably be an early reader, but other than cheerfully relating the alphabet in a sing-song voice, she was nowhere near equating said letters with what was on the printed page.

Snape's sole complaint about reading to his daughter was that the child would become fixated on one book at a time and only one book at a time. Heaven forbid he or Hermione tried to persuade Mairin to permit a nightly rendering of 'Happy Helga's Book of Shapes' if she was currently fixated on 'Sleepytime for Little Salazar'. No one, Severus had concluded, could beat a three-year-old when it came to obstinacy.

Mairin's present obsession was with a book entitled 'Ollie the Owl and the Snowy Day'. She had requested it nightly for almost a month, and the fact that it was currently spring did nothing to dampen her enthusiasm. On more than one occasion, Severus was tempted to tell Mairin that Ollie had shown up at the Snape house during her nap, demanded the book chronicling his adventures, and flown away with it until the next winter. Hermione, at least, was sympathetic.

"I know it's annoying, but it's what small children do," she assured him. "I made my poor parents read 'The Huff n' Puff Express' until the pages literally fell out."

Now there was an idea, Severus thought hopefully; if Ollie were in pieces, he would need a much-deserved rest in order to pull himself back together. Hermione, unfortunately, had shaken her head at once.

"Too late," she said. "Mairin already knows about *Reparo*."

Bloody hell. Why did he have to have such an intelligent child?

Tonight, as she had every night for weeks now, Mairin appeared at her father's side, 'Ollie the Owl and the Snowy Day' in her hands, tugging at his trouser leg and looking hopeful.

"It's your turn to tuck her in," Hermione reminded him, then escaped immediately in search of her own reading material.

Severus sighed and nodded.

"Of course, darling. We'll read, and then you'll be so tired that you'll crawl right into your big bed and fall sound asleep." It was the wizarding parent's version of *Imperius*.

"Yes, Daddy."

Mairin might be nodding vigorously, but Severus knew different. She had recently discovered that there was Life After Bedtime and that more entertainment could be had by bouncing back out of bed just when her parents thought her sound asleep. It was every bit as wearisome as the bedtime story routine, and more than once, Snape had thought that if he had a Knut for every time he or Hermione insistently repeated "Go back to bed, Mairin", he would be one wealthy wizard. First, though, he would have to get through twenty agonizing pages of Ollie the Owl.

Snape made certain that all the lights were off except for the reading lamp ("a darkened room promotes sleep," the baby books had told him, as if that were some sort of revelation) and then settled in the rocking chair. Mairin climbed in with a boost from her father, and then went about the business of arranging her teddy bear and favorite blanket in her lap. Then she settled back in Snape's arms, her dark curls tucked just beneath his chin.

Severus took a moment to savor the sensation. If someone had told him that one day he would find his ecstasy in inhaling the scent of a child and reveling in the warmth of her small body next to his, he would have sent the fool off to St. Mungo's, suitably restrained for the public good. Of all the experiences of fatherhood, this was what helped him to keep his perspective and his sanity. Early on, Snape had worried that he would be a replica of his own disinterested, remote father until Hermione admitted that on certain days, watching Mairin sleep was the only thing that kept her from wanting to send the child off with the gypsies.

"Read, Daddy!" Mairin ordered.

Severus wearily opened the book, his special private moment gone for another night.

"Ollie was an owl. He was the youngest post owl ever at the Magicville Post Office."

Mairin giggled.

"What's so funny?" Snape asked.

"Your voice tickles my head, Daddy."

So much for his famed ability to put the fear of God into a student by the carefully modulated timbre of his voice, Severus thought. He turned to the next page.

"The other owls thought that Ollie was a nuisance. He liked to hoot all night and chase mice. Sometimes he forgot to deliver the post."

"But one day, a big snowstorm hit Magicville. 'We can't get out the mail!' the Postmaster cried."

"The owls clicked their beaks. No one wanted to go out in the snow."

Severus paused there while Mairin giggled some more. The illustration on that particular page was her favorite in the whole book, thanks to the funny looks on the owls' faces. Finally, Mairin allowed him to turn the page.

"Ollie said, 'I'll deliver the mail! I love snowy days!' The other owls "

"jumped up and down and hooted with laughter," Mairin recited excitedly. "They thought that Ollie was a silly little owl."

Severus yawned. This was now the point in the story where Mairin typically took over 'reading'. She had heard the story often enough that she could recite it verbatim for the most part. A few more pages and Mairin would tilt her little face toward his and say, "You read now, Daddy." He closed his eyes and waited for that point to arrive (when Ollie became temporarily lost in the fierce storm).

It was ten minutes later when Hermione looked up from her reading to find her daughter running into the living room.

"Hello, Mummy!" Mairin crowed, climbing up onto the sofa next to Hermione.

"Mairin, what are you doing up, sweetheart?" Puzzled, Hermione put down her book.

"I told Daddy a bedtime story, and now he's sound asleep." Obviously delighted with herself, Mairin dangled her little feet off the edge of the sofa and bounced them up and down.

"You don't say." A bemused Hermione stood up. "I think I'd better check on him, don't you?"

"Yes, Mummy." Mairin picked up the book Hermione had been reading and flipped it open to inspect it upside down.

Hermione climbed the stairs to Mairin's darkened bedroom.

"*Lumos*," she murmured, flicking her wand.

The wand light illuminated the figure of Severus Snape, stretched out in the rocking chair, head drifted to one side, snoring lightly. Mairin had put her teddy bear in the crook of her father's arm, as well as tugging her blanket across his legs. Hermione stifled a laugh as she moved across the room to plant a soft kiss on her husband's forehead.

"Poor baby," she murmured, "I guess Ollie was finally too much for you, wasn't he?"

Severus mumbled something incoherent, but failed to wake up. Hermione headed back downstairs where she saw her daughter hanging off the back of the sofa.

"Is Daddy still asleep?" Mairin wanted to know.

"Yes, sweetheart. You did a wonderful job reading a bedtime story to him."

Mairin nodded, utterly self-satisfied.

"Daddy's a good boy."

Author's note: I wrote this little one-shot sort of in honor of my son's graduation from high school. The 'Huff n' Puff Express' was a book that we read to him over and over and over until we ALL had it memorized. Now, sadly, my son doesn't even remember reading it. His dad and I sure do! The idea of having Ollie show up, take the book and

whisk it away was actually what I wanted to do with our videotape of "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer". We were still watching it two months after Christmas, and I finally hid it, telling my son that Rudolph was going away until next Christmas. To this day, I can't stand Rudolph, Herbie, or the Bumble.