

First Times

by TeaOli

Logic dictates there must a first time for every experience. Knowing that doesn't necessarily make it any easier to get through. Severus tries five times. Hermione helps.

A First Among Firsts

Chapter 1 of 5

Logic dictates there must a first time for every experience. Knowing that doesn't necessarily make it any easier to get through. Severus tries five times. Hermione helps.

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A/N: This story is the result of an impromptu challenge inspired by an anti-First Times rant on the fanficrants LJ comm.

By UK standards, forty was rather *old* for a man to do this for the first time. Snape was perfectly aware of that . An impoverished childhood followed by a misspent youth hadn't prepared him for it. And spending most of his adult life living a lie didn't exactly improve matters for him.

Besides, he reasoned, plenty of people in the great wide world *never* got round to giving it a go.

One couldn't miss what one had never had, and he certainly hadn't. Not much, anyway. At least, not until she decided to come back into his life and change everything.

From the start, she'd made him want to do things he'd never considered within reach. Things he couldn't be arsed to even try with anyone but her.

Snape swallowed deeply, trying to push his apprehension behind the mask he'd worn for nearly twenty years.

He could do this.

He could do this without looking a fool.

Bugger me, I can't do this!

But even as the panicked thought threatened to force him to show anything but cool detachment, he realised it was already much too late for him to change his mind.

Hermione – the reason behind his racing heart and cramped stomach – squeezed his hand, hers reassuringly dry against his sweaty palm.

"You can do this," she whispered, and in her luminous smile, he saw the promise of a kind of joy he couldn't quite imagine on his own.

"Yes, of course," he agreed, his voice low and at its silkiest. Cool, as if he had the foggiest idea of how to go about it. As if he wasn't desperately hoping she would show him the way.

Lost in her gaze, he didn't hear what made her break eye contact, but when a cleared throat reached his ears, he snapped towards the sound, colouring guiltily.

"Dr Granger is ready for you, Mr Snape," the young man standing in the doorway told him.

Snape looked back at the woman whose hand he still held. His eyes were pleading, and he didn't care that she could see his need. He wanted her to see.

She smiled again, soft and encouraging, then squeezed his hand one more time before pulling away.

"Go on, Severus," she ordered gently. "Mum will take good care of you. I promise."

Whatever strength she'd imparted had disappeared along with her touch. He felt an urge to Disapparate then and there, leaving Hermione to deal with her parents' employee.

"It'll be all right, Mr Snape," the boy had the temerity to add with what the wizard assumed was supposed to be a look of sympathy.

Severus sent a glare towards him. The condescending smile didn't disappear.

It would seem I lost far more than nearly two years of freedom whilst in hospital he mused with a pang. *Must work on that.*

In deference to the sudden weakness plaguing his trembling calves, he stood slowly. Just when the urge to flee overcame his fear of splinching himself, she was standing beside him, whispering in his ear.

As he listened to her promised rewards for "good behaviour," he forgot to hide his snarly, yellowed teeth.

If At First You Don't Succeed

Chapter 2 of 5

It was easier when he had someone else to blame; he admitted that quite freely.

Disclaimer in the first chapter.

The pocket watch's slow ticking taunted him.

His knees were like jelly; his bowels like water.

It was easier when he had someone else to blame; he admitted that quite freely. After he'd sealed his fate and exchanged one master for another, only to have his one bit of happiness extinguished, at least he'd had reproach and revulsion to stiffen his spine. But this time the choice had been entirely his own (not that there was any other worth considering), and this time he couldn't wrap himself in a cloak of righteous hatred, or even numbing guilt, to hide what was happening.

She could have done, of course. It was perfectly in-keeping with her nature. Her pushy, pompous personality was perfect for playing suzerain to his serf.

But the only fealty she demanded was love – for himself as much as for her. Perhaps more for himself, even. In the end, his inability to comply had led to him to this moment.

There was nothing for it, then, but to start as he meant to go on.

He consulted his watch one last time before steeling his spine and entering a student-filled Hogwarts classroom for the first time since he'd failed to die.

A seemingly careless gesture caused the door to slam shut in his wake.

His robes billowing in what he hoped was a suitably impressive manner, he stalked up the aisle without acknowledging the staring eyes tracking his progress.

Silence pressed in from all sides.

At the front of the room, he spun on his heel. He stood there, wordlessly staring back at his audience, long enough to be certain their attention wouldn't waver.

"You are here," he began, allowing his softly voiced words to flow over the room's inhabitants, "to study the delicate discipline and precise procedure for defending yourselves and others against the Darkest of magics."

SS~HG

As they'd planned when deciding to buy the small cottage on Hogsmeade's outskirts, he got home first. By the time Hermione arrived, looking slightly sleepy, he'd already measured and sliced all the necessary ingredients. She eyed with interest the pot bubbling ominously over a low flame, but said nothing before settling down at the broad table to watch him work.

"You'd think we hadn't just finished a war seven years ago, for all those dunderheads charged with teaching 'the next generation' have done!" he grouched.

When she failed to point out that at least two of those "dunderheads" were her closest friends – only nodded in sympathy, murmuring, "I'm sure you'll do better, Severus" – he decided it was safe to go on.

"Of course, that will mean revising the entire syllabus." A glance in her direction confirmed she was still listening attentively. Was that a smile tugging at her lips? "I mightn't have much time to spare until it is complete."

He turned and stalked from workbench to range. Tossing a handful of herbs into the mix, he stirred carefully until a fragrant aroma suffused the room.

She would help him ensure the needed changes would be made, of course. Her decisive, dauntless disposition made her perfect for playing paladin to his provocateur.

"You might have to learn to cook," he said without looking away from his task.

"I expect I will," she said, laughing as she came up behind him and wrapped her arms round his waist. "And I suppose you'll have to teach me, then. After all, you are rather good at that."

"Yes," he agreed, turning in her embrace. "I suppose I am."

You Never Forget Your First Time

Chapter 3 of 5

Hermione wants to try something she denied Severus during what passed for their honeymoon.

Disclaimer in the first chapter.

"Never?" Incredulity left her voice a bit screechy. While it was an interesting change from her more usual inflections, it wasn't exactly a pleasant one and Severus grimaced at the sound.

"Not even *once*?" Obviously, the Brightest Witch of Her Age had regressed over the years.

"No."

"But you're fifty-*one* years old!" she protested. "How is that even possible?"

"You know my history," he said with as much patience as he could force. "I was hardly the type anyone would ask, and by the time I could afford to pay for it on my own, I was... often otherwise occupied."

He could have lied about his reasons, but he knew, from painful experience, she'd only catch him out, eventually. And then there would be hell to pay. It was best just to offer her honesty most of the time, really.

Since the end of the war, Hermione'd found far more success in getting others to join her ridiculous efforts *athelping others*. Their marriage had come to pass as one such scheme.

The reality of it was nothing like the alliance she'd led him to expect.

He wasn't even out of hospital before she'd tossed her proposal at him, promising companionship and a chance at a fresh start. He hadn't believed in the future she envisioned, but since finding a willing witch was a term of his parole, overlooking the flaws in her argument wasn't a huge chore.

Oh, in the beginning, things were exactly as she said they'd be. As promised, she gave him friendship, trust and a chance to more fully recover from that blasted snake's bite.

But what was supposed to be a four-year partnership had lasted nearly threes times that. And she didn't appear to mind in the least.

"Might as well leave things as they are," she was wont to say on the rare occasion he broached the subject. "It's not as if either one of us has any other prospects."

And yet, things were decidedly different to what they'd been at the start. Each little change had come about too gradually for him to notice it in time to extricate himself. Not that he'd ever *considered* complaining. Despite his best intentions he was now dependent on a little witch who swore she knew best and who ruled his life.

"I can't believe I didn't know this about you," she said now. "Why did you never say anything?"

He studied his toes. "Well, I did suggest...that is to say, on our honeymoon..."

"But I was too busy wanting to explore Athens to pay proper attention!" she cut in with a frown that rivalled the best of his own. "But if you had just told *me*hy, I might have responded differently."

He didn't bother to respond. Severus Snape didn't beg. She knew that.

"I'll make it up to you!" she said suddenly and leapt up. "Let's do it!"

Severus arched an eyebrow and frowned. "What? *Now*?"

"Yes, now! It's not all that late."

She smiled at him hopefully.

He hated when she did that. At least that's what he liked to tell himself. The truth was, he relished every conniving, manipulative grin which crossed her face.

Only just holding back a long-suffering sigh (with her, it was never a good idea to show signs of weakness), Severus curled his lips together in what he (rather proudly) could feel was a sneer worthy of his best years baiting Gryffindors.

But she was too busy pulling her nightgown over her head to notice.

"I haven't said yes," he pointed out, trying to sound bored and dispassionate.

He failed.

"But you won't say no," she pointed out.

Of course, I won't! Not with you over there looking likethat!

He searched his deepest depths for the familiar spark of bitterness and annoyance, but only succeeding in finding anticipation and a touch of nerves.

She stood before him, in all her naked glory, smiling again. This time, he recognised certainty and a hint of triumph in her wide brown eyes.

"You won't, you know," she asserted.

"Oh, all right!" he snapped. "Yes. Are you quite satisfied?"

"Not yet," she told him, stepping up to the bed. Leaning forward, she took his hand in hers and tugged until he was sitting up. "But I will be soon," she murmured as he slipped his arms round her (naked!) waist and buried his face in her bosom.

SS~HG

"Your efforts to mould me into an ideal husband leave much to be desired," he muttered in her ear. He clutched her to his chest, still a bit woozy from Side-Along Apparating to an unfamiliar district in London and not quite ready to accept his plans for the evening had been interrupted.

Hermione dropped her arms, stepping away from him before he was ready.

"Ooh! Mum has that on DVD. The one with Rupert Everett. We should borrow that for next time."

Though a great lover of Oscar Wilde, Severus didn't look forward to a night of listening to his wife rhapsodising over the dark good looks of another man. He kept that to himself and allowed her to lead them out of the darkened alley.

He nearly stumbled when she abruptly halted the brisk pace she'd set.

"What...?" A quick glance around them answered his question before he finished asking.

A long queue, at least four people deep and confined within ropes attached to stanchions at regular intervals, stretched from the cinema doors and down the walkway. There must have been hundreds, if not thousands, waiting to enter.

Most disturbing was that at least half of the crowd was dressed in flowing robes.

Surreptitiously, Severus reached for his wand.

SS~HG

"Oh, *damn!*"

Hermione's exclamation didn't seem suitably distressed considered they'd just arrived to find hundreds of witches and wizards breaking the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy. Severus glanced at her and saw she looked far more upset than she sounded.

"Let's just go back home," she said. "You can see your first movie some other time."

She started to turn away, raising his suspicions.

"A moment, please," he said, closing his fingers around her upper arm. "What's your rush..."

Then he saw the cinema's marquee; it announced in large black letters:

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part II

He glanced back down in time to catch Hermione's concerned look.

"I didn't know," she said worriedly. "I haven't been keeping up with the Muggle papers lately."

Severus ruminated on their situation. He didn't especially want to relive bad memories or open up old wounds, but he truly didn't think there was much danger of that.

Still, "As long as you don't wish to see that particular, film," he told her, "I see no reason not to do as we planned."

She smiled up at him. It was a weak, wobbly tremulous thing. He wanted to applaud the courage her effort evinced.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," he said, guiding her past the queue to the ticket window.

SS~HG

"Potter's sold out," the clerk announced from inside her glass cage.

"Thank *Merlin*," Severus said, sotto voce.

"That's fine," Hermione said, her sharp elbow connecting with his ribs. "We'll take two for whatever else is showing soonest."

"Really?" asked the clerk, leaning right up to the glass window separating her from the Muggle masses. "Because, I hope you don't mind me saying, with your hair, you'd be a better Hermione than that Watson girl. And your bloke would make a good Snape, I should think. That Alan Rickman's too handsome by far!" She giggled to herself, but then caught Hermione's glare. Leaning back, the clerk rushed to add, "Not that your man doesn't have a certain way about him. Besides, Rickman is too old, as well." She didn't wait for Hermione's face to unfreeze. "Right, then. Which do you fancy, *Potiche* or *Bad Teacher*?"

Severus saw the grin his wife was struggling to hide as she glanced at him.

Turning back to the clerk, she said, "*Potiche*, I think," and handed over her credit card.

They both watched the clerk's eyes go round as she stared at the card instead of completing the transaction.

"Of course, the courts dismissed my wife's defamation claim against Ms. Rowling," Severus offered. "Something about common names, you know."

The clerk looked up and gave them a brief, disbelieving smile before typing something into her machine.

"Right," she muttered.

"We had to settle for Obliviating her accountant, instead," Severus said, his voice dark and dangerous. He let the tip of his wand slip past the edge of his sleeve.

The clerk's head snapped back up.

"Er, right," she said, licking her lips nervously, then pushed Hermione's card back through the slot. "Oh, look! Turns out we're running a promotion tonight. Fourteenth and fifteenth guests for *Potiche* are in free." She tapped something else into the machine then pushed two tickets through the slot. "Enjoy your show."

First Impression

Chapter 4 of 5

He'd first agreed solely to please her. No one told him the pleasure would be (almost) all his.

Disclaimer in the first chapter.

He combed long, pale fingers through the triangle of dark, curling hair.

His wife shuddered.

He hummed his satisfaction.

Mmm. This was a good thing. And even better when she watches!

Almost as if she could hear his thoughts – she couldn't, Severus was certain; Hermione was a crap Occlumens and had never so much as attempted Legilimency – her lids began to slide down. What she *did* have was a penchant for perverseness, picked up from her husband.

No, darling! Don't close those lovely brown eyes.

Had he spoken aloud? No. He must have whimpered or— no matter. She was staring at him now, eyes unfocused but open. *Yes*. Glazed with ecstasy was brilliant.

Fantastic!

Having got his way for once, Severus returned in earnest to what he'd been doing.

At first, he hadn't been convinced it could be this good. But in the end – and as was usual in their relationship – he'd been helpless against Hermione's constant cajoling. Nagging, really.

He really *must* find a way to regain the upper hand with her. Although, if the results of compliance were this wonderful – and they most often were – well, perhaps an imbalance of power wasn't such a bad thing.

This really is pleasing, he thought as he furthered his exploration. *Surely finding a way to thank her for allowing me to please her wouldn't make me seem too much her whipping boy?*

A long moment passed before he dismissed the idea (*Upper hand, man!*) because the small part of his brain still capable of functioning whilst in his current state – the one that knew as well as anyone that rewarding his wife's domineering behaviour (No matter how much you like what happens when you did as you are told!) left him worse than a slave to her pleasures – was only just barely able to get through his suffusion of bliss to bludgeon him into thinking semi-clearly.

Severus idly wondered if a Muggle wife would have been able to so capably confound him. Then, the hairs curling around his fingers caught his attention again, and he was lost.

So... beautiful. Thank you, my Hermione, for making me see what a... treasure this is. So... forceful when you want something. Like this...

One finger crept slowly, inexorably slithering, toward the moist slit bisecting the neatly trimmed thatch. His tongue slipped out in anticipation.

"Enough!" Hermione cried.

The finger halted its journey. Severus's smile faltered, but he quickly recovered it.

"What's wrong, my dear?" He moved to nuzzle the soft skin between her neck and shoulder.

She jerked out of reach, her gaze suddenly sharp. "Don't you come near me," she snapped. "Not after what you've been doing for the last. Ten. Minutes!"

What was she on about? A new game, perhaps? Severus liked the games she liked to play.

"But, I thought you liked it," he moaned mournfully, hoping he'd got it right.

Folding her arms across her chest, she looked away before replying in a quiet, wounded tone. "That was before I realised you liked more than you like me."

He nearly laughed. His wife was also a crap actress.

Except, there was no sign of the telltale smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Nimue's knife! She wasn't in earnest? Severus felt a familiar fury rise within. *Of all the—* He needn't accept her manipulative nonsense!

"What? Hermione, you asked me for it," he pointedly pointed out. "I never would have attempted this in the first place if you hadn't ordered me to!"

And if for the briefest of moments he guiltily wondered if her hurt feelings were genuine, he needn't have bothered; she was right back to righteous indignation before he had time to apologise and begin again.

"I did not 'order' you to do anything!" she protested. He half expected her to hex him. "I said it might be nice to try it. Now, it's all you pay attention to!"

"That is patently untrue, you bossy little—"

"It's true enough!" She folded her arms beneath her breasts, pushing them up quite fetchingly (he refused to be distracted by *that* display!) and glared at him belligerently. "There *are* other things requiring your attention, in case you hadn't noticed."

"The beard stays, Hermione!" Not waiting for her response to his declaration, he stormed from the washroom, down the hall and into his bedroom.

When she'd first brought up a beard as possible remedy to his dissatisfaction with both his looks and his apparently softer demeanour, his first instinct had been to dismiss it as a daft solution conjured by the romantic imaginings of a silly girl who'd read far too much Blackbeard for her own good. But he'd stopped shaving the next day. Because, since when did he deny his wife – who had grown into anything *but* a silly little girl – *anything* at all?

Yet, despite all the itching discomfort of the first weeks, allowing his beard to come in for the first time had been a revelation! It seemed as if some part of him that had gone missing on the filthy floor of the Shrieking Shack had found its way back through the hairs sprouting from his face. He felt strong, imposing – intimidating, even! – when he looked in the mirror.

It also didn't hurt that the silky curls drew observers' eyes from the shape and length of his nose.

Merlin's beard! Severus had never imagined their first fight would be over something so silly as his *own* beard! Of course, she'd never before demanded anything of him he hadn't been willing to give. Or give up, as it were.

"Not this time," he muttered darkly as he plumped his pillow. Crawling under the duvet, he turned on his side. "Now I've got my—*What was it that ridiculous spy in that even more ridiculous film had called it? Mojo.* "Now I've got my mojo—" Severus savoured the way the word rolled from his tongue "—back, I shan't be relinquishing it again. Not even for her!"

Unconsciously, he reached for the triangle of hair that was the source of his newly rediscovered confidence *Manliness*. A smirk curled his lips as his fingers groomed the unruly curls covering his cheeks and chin.

Probably jealous that mine are more manageable than hers he told himself. The idea delighted him immensely and he began to chuckle.

His muffled laughter covered the even quieter sound of bare feet softly padding across the bare wood floor. It wasn't until he felt the mattress dip under her weight that he became aware of her presence.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, sounding truly contrite.

He turned to his other side to better observe the slight figure perched on the edge of the bed.

"It really is a lovely beard," she went on, sounding a bit breathless.

Severus only grunted. *No need to forgive her easily when making her work for it can yield more desirable results.*

Hermione reached out to touch his face, her fingers twining in the dark hair.

"I could cut it off," he offered, feigning reluctant acquiescence. He'd only just remembered how amusing it could be when *he* was the one serving out the perverse responses.

"No!"

He widened his eyes, trying (and succeeding quite nicely, if her reaction of any indication) to look alarmed and unsure.

"I-I mean, you shouldn't do it for... *forme*," she explained, stammering a bit. "Because I *do* like the way it feels against my skin. Only... only I prefer to feel it against *my* skin to watching you groom it."

That was all he needed to hear.

A/N: Each chapter was meant to have only one first time, but this one has as least two.

The First Time Ever I...

Chapter 5 of 5

Severus had dreamed of doing this for far longer than he cared to admit.

Disclaimer in the first chapter.

I want to do this, Severus Snape told himself.

He did! Had dreamed of it for far longer than he cared to admit. Yes, when he and Hermione had first married, they had only promised each other friendship. Before the first month was out, he'd known that particular pledge was bollocks – he'd wanted far more than friendship – but hadn't exactly felt in position to tell her. It took her inquisitive nature – once a source of annoyance – to get them over that first hurdle.

But taking this next step was all on him. Faced with the knowledge it was within reach – The truth was... well, the truth was that he was apprehensive.

And that was something she could never, ever know.

"Shall you take the lead, then?" she asked. "You're the expert, after all. I've only read books about it, but you've been practising for ages."

He had to bite back a sneer at the teasing note in her voice.

Only his nearly two decades of carefully cultivated control – acquired at great cost, and only recently recaptured – kept his hands from shaking as he went about his preparations. He stalled for time, gathering phials of potions and pots of lotions and taking them to the washroom whilst Hermione giggled.

The witch knew him too well.

Six months before, fuelled by a boundless ambition only the most motivated of sometime Slytherins might muster and commanding the canniest cunning he could call upon, the erstwhile spy had enacted a succession of subtle subterfuges designed to deliver his deepest desire.

A month into his planning, he'd known he needed help. Thirty days, it seemed, was about average for him figuring out the important bits in his life.

SS~HG

If any wizard could counsel him, Severus decided, surely Arthur Weasley was that wizard. Six (formerly seven) pieces of evidence suggested the man likely had *some* skill in the area. Severus wasn't so naïve as to believe that such competence was entirely *necessary*, but he doubted Molly Weasley would tolerate the lack.

He also doubted Arthur was any match for a displeased Molly. In fact, he knew the patriarch of the wizarding world's own Redheaded League was not. He just hadn't been certain if the wizard was willing to offer his assistance.

Almost as if he were waiting to be asked, Arthur came through at once. Slipping Severus a battered card with "Domesticis Officiis Locum-tenens Liber" written in fancifully swirling script above "Madame Manikin" and an address just off Diagon Alley, he explained, "I gave these to all my boys before they got married— even Harry. The witches in our family like their wizards to know what they're about. Hermione's no different, I expect. Else she wouldn't have made you wait nearly fourteen years!"

Although Severus had little patience for being sent up, as Weasley was aiding and abetting his objective, he allowed the man his laugh.

"This one was to be Charlie's," the older wizard went on a good deal more soberly, "but I think by now we all know *what* won't be happening."

The mangled Latin left Severus sceptical, but Arthur reassured him.

"I would have been lost without Madame M. She's very helpful," he promised. "And totally discreet."

Following Weasley's recommendation, Severus arrived just after dark, and though he was disconcerted to find himself outside a children's toy shop, he went in and presented the card to the wizened witch waiting by the till.

Madame Manikin smiled at the card and at him, saying, "Most wizards want one that resembles their wives," and led him to a windowless room which was filled, floor to ceiling, with dolls of every shape and size imaginable to suit the purpose. (Not that Severus had ever quite imagined making such a purchase.) "Witches usually choose one that looks like their husbands. It's all very romantic."

She put together a selection she thought would meet his needs, describing each one's special features.

He bought one – "Excellent choice. She's quite lively. And noisy!" – with a mass of dark curling hair he thought looked nothing at all like Hermione.

SS~HG

Still stalling, Severus laid out a fluffy towel for after. Because that didn't use up nearly enough time, he unstopped one of the gentle cleansing potions he'd so carefully brewed himself and soaked an even softer cloth in it and warm water.

Then there really wasn't anything left to do but begin.

"You can do it," he said aloud, but didn't stick around to see if the mirror disagreed.

Just as his wife said, he *had* spent months preparing for this. And everything had gone well enough until the day she arrived home early and caught him at it.

SS~HG

Hermione had wandered into the bedroom and loudly wondered "...what on *Earth* are you doing with that doll?"

"She's not a doll," he primly protested. "She is a *D.O.L.L.*"

Severus pulled the doll's (Yes, it *was*, in fact, a doll, and he knew it; only he wasn't going to admit that to his wife!) packaging from the cupboard where it had spent the last three months hiding.

Taking the proffered box, Hermione frowned as she studied the label.

"The book takes the place of home offices?" she guessed, looking up at him and frowning even more. "Location free from domestic duties?"

"Madame Manikin is a toymaker, not a Latin scholar," he pointed out. "I should think her true objective was nevertheless obvious. Use that much vaunted brain of yours!"

He wanted to apologise as soon as the harsh words left his mouth, but she caught on, saying, "Oh! I can see how she came up with that, I suppose," although her inflection said she suspected Madame Manikin was an imbecile. "I expect if she needed a way to say 'doll' without really saying it, that was the best she could do."

Then she shyly confessed to having procured and read several books on the subject, herself, and Severus forgot all about saying he was sorry.

SS~HG

Only that had been three months ago and now he was expected to actually *perform*. For an *audience*.

Still anxious, but resolute, Severus left the washroom. Fumbling just a bit over releasing buttons smaller than his fingers were truly accustomed to, he slowly removed clothing which was not his own. By the time he was finished, Hermione's laughter had long since been exchanged for shallow breathing.

"Go on, then," she whispered.

He spread one large hand beneath his beloved burden's head and neck; the other he slipped under her naked bum. Gently lifting, he cradled her against his chest. Using slow, careful steps, he carried her through the bedroom to the en suite as if he were walking to the gallows.

But soon enough, Severus was in his element. He found his nerves disappeared as he got down to business, no matter that she squirmed and squealed quite a bit more than the D.O.L.L. had done.

"Your mother," he murmured conspiratorially, but not so quietly that the woman in question would not overhear, "is a know-it-all. She'll wish to give you your *second* bath on her own. Let us hope she pays careful attention."

So absorbed was he in the scent of his daughter's freshly washed little head, he failed to notice his wife's soft smile.

A/N: According to Madame Manikin's mangled Latin, *liber* = child, *locum-tenens* = takes the place of (as in a substitute), *officiis* = duty or obligation, and *domesticis* = domestic. Strictly speaking, those *are* acceptable translations for each word or phrase, but...