

Children Are a Blessing, Not a Burden

by notsosaintly

Oh, the trials and tribulations of a father left alone with his children...

1. Day One

Chapter 1 of 3

Oh, the trials and tribulations of a father left alone with his children...

Disclaimer: I thank JK Rowling for having the imaginative genius to create such malleable characters. Still, her characters are not my own. I simply ask them to come out to play every once in a while.

A/N: This story is written in response to [SASS's Babysitting Challenge](#). It takes place years after JKR's books, so the war is over and nothing but a very bad memory. Yes, this can be categorized as alternate universe, but I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. My children were my inspiration.

"Day One"

Skepticism was written all over her face.

"Severus, are you *sure* you will be all right? Harry's number is on your desk if you need help..."

"I most certainly will **not** be in need of rescuing by the Boy Wonder. The mere *fact* that you doubt my parenting skills is most insulting," Severus snarled most endearingly at his wife. "Besides, the Charms Convention lasts only three days. I am sure our children will come out unscathed from the ordeal."

"Severus, the last time you took care of the kids, you gave them all sleeping draughts. If I find out that you have done that again..."

He pressed her valise into her hand and led her to the door. "Hermione, sweet angel." He had learned the art of sweet-talking well. "I have learned my lesson. Poppy has lectured me on the dangers of giving potions to the kids. If anything needs to be administered, I will bow to her greater expertise."

He grimaced. *Greater expertise my bloody arse*, he thought grumpily.

Hermione stopped in the doorway and gave him one last searching look. She really had no choice but to attend the conference. She had a lecture to give, and Severus really *was* capable of looking after the children. She did not necessarily agree with his methods, but then again, their children's lives had never been endangered...not really.

"Now leave," he ordered, leaning down to give her a peck on the cheek. "I have things well in hand."

Shaking her head in defeat, she reached upwards for a longer kiss. "I will miss you," she whispered. "Be a good boy, or I'll have to deduct house points this time."

"You would not dare," he growled into her lips.

"Watch me," she quipped and then was gone.

Sighing wearily, Severus closed the door to their dungeon quarters. To be perfectly honest, he had no idea how he was going to last the entire weekend without Hermione; however, he would swim through the squid-infested lake before he admitted that to her. Severus felt a tug on the hem of his robes and looked down his long nose at the small figure looking balefully up at him, a tear gleaming in her eye.

"Whatever is the matter, Saffie?" the tower of a man spoke down to the small child.

"I want Mommy," she pouted, stretching her short arms straight up over her head. "Pick me."

Severus bent and picked up his two-year-old daughter. Her black curls spun in mad ringlets about her tiny face. She was adorable; everyone said so, from the headmaster straight down to every single first year. No one seemed to mind that the little urchin loved to run pell-mell down the corridors in between classes, bouncing off legs, knocking over rucksacks and textbooks. All Saffie had to do was look up at the one she inconvenienced with huge doe eyes, push out her bottom lip, and all thoughts of a reprimand were banished. No doubt, the girl was spoiled rotten.

"Where is your brother? He was supposed to be watching you." A six-year-old's help only went so far.

"I don't know," the little creature sing-songed, playing with the top button of his frock coat.

"Sean!" he bellowed, making his way back into the sitting room.

"What!" a muffled voice answered from somewhere in their spacious quarters.

Severus waited an interminable minute before yelling for his son a second time. As usual, his son knew just which button to push to incite his anger. How many times did he have to tell the boy to come when he was called?

"Sean! Will you *please* come here ... right NOW!"

"Wight NOW!" Saffie parroted, finally managing to pry the topmost button free of its enclosure. Chewing on her bottom lip, she began on the next.

Muffled grumbling and heavy footsteps were the only indication he had been heard. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose between two fingers.

"Have a hurt, Daddy?" Saffie tilted her head at her father. "I kiss it?"

"Yes, Saffie, Daddy's head hurts." That was most certainly an understatement. His final class of the day had resulted in two cauldron explosions and one solid lump of gods-knew-what some fool had miraculously managed to fuse with the cauldron and spoon.

The door slammed open, cracking against the nearest bookcase. Sean stomped through the room and threw himself on the couch, arms folded, an all-too-familiar scowl on his face. A miniature Severus in full pique.

"Sean. You were supposed to be watching your sister," Severus scolded the boy.

"So?"

Six years old and already impertinent. What is the boy going to be like when he is twelve? Severus massaged his left temple and decided to let go of the thought lest his head explode. The boy was too much like him. Whereas Saffie seemed to attract people to her like a magnet, Sean repelled them. People tended to give the boy a wide berth.

"What have you been doing?" Severus asked, but didn't really need to. He had a fair idea.

"Reading, if you must know," the boy sassed. He looked up at his father from under his eyebrows. "And Saffie won't leave me alone. How am I supposed to read when she keeps climbing all over me?"

Sighing, Severus set Saffie on the floor, his hands unconsciously buttoning the two buttons she had undone. Saffie's little legs instantly carried her off at a teetering trot, her head narrowly missing the side table. Shaking his head at her endless energy, he turned to Sean.

"Listen to me." Severus softened his voice in an attempt not to sound pained. He sat next to his son. "Your mother just left for the conference. Do you think it is at all possible for you to help me with your sister this weekend?"

Sean glanced over at his father. His scowl relaxed a bit. "If I help you, I want you to take me to Paris over the holiday."

"Why Paris?" At the mention of France, his head throbbed. Paris. It was a pantheon of putrid pretentiousness. Not to mention, he felt foolish speaking French, although he could do so with relative fluency when he had absolutely no other choice.

"I want to go to Disneyland," the boy said eagerly.

Oh, this conversation was not going the way he had planned. Parisian pomposity was infinitely better than multitudes of Muggles and wearing those tight pants Hermione called jeans. His balls ached painfully at the memory. He loved Hermione, but being subjected to what Muggles called entertainment was a special kind of torture. He honestly wished she would stop filling their children's heads with petty Muggle nonsense.

Severus cleared his throat, a precursor to objection that Sean knew only too well.

"You *do* want me to help you with Saffie, don't you, Father? Unless you want to call Uncle Harry?" Sean smirked smugly.

Severus cast a sharp glance in his son's direction. The boy was going to be the death of him. He always seemed to know which button to push. If Sean *wasn't* sorted into Slytherin when he started school, Severus swore he would eat his wand, core and all.

"Fine," he ground out, knowing full well he was going to regret this. However, anything was better than asking the Boy Wonder for help. He snorted and folded his arms in imitation of his son, slipping into his own scowl. He needed a snifter of Firewhiskey in the worst way, but he knew better than to get drunk when he was alone with his children. For some reason, the situation always seemed to lend itself to more than one glass. He would have to settle for a headache potion.

Whisp. Whissp. Whisssssppp.

The sound seemed to be coming from the other room. *Whiiiiisssssppp.* What in Merlin's name was that noise? *Whs...WHISSSSPPP!* Both man and boy seemed to ponder it for a moment as they sat in twin silence, but neither appeared too interested. Until, suddenly, Sean's head perked up.

"Nooooooooo!"

Sean shot off the sofa and bolted through the door Saffie had run through only minutes ago...minutes that felt like ages to Severus. He looked after his son, wondering what

Saffie had gotten herself into now. Then there was absolute silence.

"Oh, Fa-ther!" Sean affected his best tattling voice. Severus made no move to get off the couch. It certainly did not sound life threatening, whatever it was. He placed his head in his hands and massaged both temples this time. His head bloody well *hurt*.

The noise sounded eerily familiar, though. What was in that room that could possibly make that sort of noise? It was so hard to think through the thumping rush of blood in his head, so difficult to connect the dots ... Then, it hit him exactly what it was.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake!" He jumped off the couch. *Shite ... SHITE!*

Severus crossed the room in three huge strides and stood gripping the doorframe. There was Saffie, sitting on the floor in the middle of what looked like a pile of autumn leaves. It took Severus a moment in his headache-induced haze to realize the leaves were actually pages upon pages of his Potions manuals, reference books and reams of notes that Saffie had deemed unfit for their bindings.

"Saffie! You bad girl!" He swooped down, plucked her up and held her small body in front of him at eye level. "What have you done to Daddy's research?!" he bellowed.

Bottom lip trembling at the volume of his voice, she said meekly, "I break."

Sean sniggered in the corner and Severus spun to face him.

"Don't look at *me*, Father. I *would* have been watching Saffie if you hadn't needed to talk to me."

Severus handed Saffie over to Sean, who staggered under the girl's weight.

"All right, then, Sean," Severus's voice dropped an octave, a sign the boy knew meant his father had been pushed to his limit. "Take her into the sitting room and, for Merlin's sake, *watch* her while I clean up this mess. And *bywatch*, I mean *do not* take your eyes off of her."

All projects were best undertaken with a clear head, Severus thought, so he headed off to the bathroom to take a headache potion before repairing the books. He rested his forehead against the cool, stone wall while he waited for it to take effect.

A familiar script ran through his recovering brain. How did he let Hermione talk him into having children? Oh, yes, he remembered now. Something about how she wanted to prove to him that not all children were a burden; that he could actually view children as a blessing. That was it. Well, that and the fact that she would not have married him if he had not conceded. He smiled and took a deep, headache-free breath. It most certainly had been worth it, he had to admit.

The damage to the books was serious, but reversible. They were repaired, one at a time, with a simple *Reparo* charm. He watched as the pages resorted themselves in midair and flew back into their original places, rebinding themselves. If Hermione were here, she would be telling him how lucky he was to be a wizard; a Muggle would have to spend hours refitting and refastening each page by hand.

Finishing the last of the repairs, Severus noticed bubbles of laughter coming from the other room. Sighing deeply, he supposed he should be glad Sean was entertaining Saffie, but Sean's idea of fun was a tad warped, if not cruel at times. He wondered briefly where in the gene pool that tendency came from. Returning the books to their respective places, he noticed that Saffie's laughter was getting a little overly hysterical.

Walking into the sitting room, Severus was greeted by a small body floating upside down above the couch while her brother spun his wand in her direction. Saffie's face was bright red from laughter and from all the blood having drained into her face. Her arms and hair were flailing madly about.

"Da-ddy! Look!" she screamed as her brother spun her around, the curls whipping around her face. She flopped like a rag doll. "Again! Spin me!"

"Sean, put her down." He was trying to be calm, really. It was a conscious effort.

"She's having fun, Father. We're playing Boobah." He spun his sister again.

"Wheeeeeee! Boobah! Boobah! Boobah!" Saffie chanted.

"Sean, put her down *NOW!*" Bugger calm.

Sean righted his sister and lowered her to the couch where she came to a rest, relishing in her dizziness and giggling uncontrollably.

"Sean, your magic is not strong enough to levitate your sister. She could fall." It wasn't the first time. In fact, he had scolded Sean for the same thing yesterday three times. Severus brought to mind Hermione telling him that six-year-old memories were in need of constant reinforcement, that it was *normal*, for Merlin's sake, for six-year-olds to have to be told things again and again, ad nauseam.

"She was over the couch," the boy whined. "Perhaps you would rather we play Teletubbies. I can turn her yellow and put a telly in her tummy."

"Tubbies! Tubbies!" Saffie squealed and clapped her hands, bouncing up and down on her seat.

"What the bloody *hell* is a Teletubby?!" Severus shouted. On second thought, he figured, it was probably best not to know. "Never mind. You two go wash your hands and faces for dinner."

He pointed them out the door. That should keep them occupied for all of about five minutes, at least. The children raced each other out the door. Saffie tripped and skidded on her stomach before righting herself and continuing forward as though nothing amiss had happened. Severus collapsed on the nearest piece of furniture to enjoy the brief moment of silence before dinner.

Closing his eyes, he leaned back and listened to Sean and Saffie shouting and laughing over the running water in the bathroom. All in all, the day had gone rather smoothly, a couple of minor incidents notwithstanding. He did not know what Hermione was so worried about. It was not as difficult as she implied it would be. At least dinner, bath and bedtime was his usual routine. He was in familiar territory now.

Hermione always chided him that he had the easiest part of the day. The children were always too busy eating, cleaning up and listening to their bedtime story to cause too much trouble. After that, of course, they were asleep. He loved watching them when they were sleeping. They both looked like little angels. And the best part was, of course, that they were so *quiet*.

He sighed. He supposed that Hermione dealt with a tad more excitement where their children were concerned. Still, if today was any indication of what the next two days were going to be like, he should come out on the other end smelling like a rose. In fact, the only difficulty he foresaw was how to get out of taking Sean to Disneyland.

~ End Day One

A/N: For those of you who do not know what Boobah is: It is a British television show for babies and toddlers. Five differently-colored, oddly-named, star-like creatures that seem to be possessed by some sort of anti-gravity charm. The colors! Oh, the colors!

Saffie is a nickname for Saffron. (Absolutely Fabulous!) Saffron is also a spice.

Someone once questioned the name of Disneyland in Paris. Disneyland is, in fact, the proper name for the facility. Only Americans call it Euro Disney.

Please stay tuned for Day Two, in which Severus smells like something, but definitely not a rose. Did I pique your curiosity?

Day Two

Chapter 2 of 3

The second day of the trials and tribulations of fatherhood.

"Day Two"

Albus had expanded the High Table especially for the growing families of Severus and Hermione and two other professors he had employed who were married but, as of yet, without children. Papa Albus, as Sean and Saffie knew him, endlessly doted upon the children, indulging their every whim. It drove Severus insane.

Getting the children ready for breakfast had severely tried his patience. He was never one to speak much in the morning, which was why Hermione usually took on the task of the children's morning routine. By the time they managed to get out the door, Severus was at the breaking point...a state he managed to frequently find himself in, but never *before* his morning tea.

They reached the staff table fifteen minutes late, a fact that was noted by several smirking professors, and it took another five to get the kids settled and Saffie properly secured. Severus turned to take his own seat, only to find the headmaster directly behind him. His tentative nerve twinged.

"Good morning, Severus." Papa Albus beamed. "Good morning, children! Are you giving your daddy a frightful time?"

Saffie nodded her head up and down vigorously, making her curls dance in front of her eyes just the way she liked it. Sean just smirked back at the old man, having learned early the art of humoring his adopted grandfather.

"Do you have any candy for us today, Papa Albus?" Sean asked, hand sticking out expectantly.

Not one to disappoint, the headmaster reached into his voluminous robes and drew out two small sacks of sweets.

"Albus, you are going to spoil the children," Severus protested.

"Nonsense, my boy. I have already done so. I'm afraid it is too late." Albus smiled at Severus as he deposited the candy into waiting palms. "And how are you faring this morning with Hermione gone? I see the children gave you a run for your galleons this morning."

Severus followed Albus's gaze down to the front of his shirt where several buttons had not yet been done. Muttering curses under his breath and turning his back to the potentially prying eyes of students, he quickly finished dressing.

"Now, now, Severus. It is completely understandable. Children do have a way of drawing your attention away from other matters. I, myself, find your children ~~love~~ distraction. Why don't you sit, fix yourself a nice cup of tea and relax?" Albus looked as though he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

Relax? Severus wanted to scream: He hadn't had a moment's relaxation since Hermione left for the blasted conference. He placated the man with a forced grimace and sat down to his daily intake of caffeine.

Halfway through his second cup, he noticed that Saffie had decided that making mash out of her banana and cornflakes, with her fingers no less, was infinitely more interesting than eating them. Fine. Breakfast was most definitely over. Severus scooped up Saffie from behind, letting her dangling arms and legs flail uselessly while she giggled, and with a jerk of his head, signaled his son to follow.

~~~~~OXO~~~~~

He had to admit, it was fortunate he only had to deal with a minor mess at breakfast. It could have been worse. At the beginning of term, he had turned his head for one minute to speak with Minerva, and Saffie had disappeared. He had spent the better part of the meal searching for her, finally finding her betwixt the feet of the first-year Hufflepuff students. While they had the intelligence to look thoroughly terrified, the Slytherins at the next table had exchanged amused smirks. Some even had the nerve to laugh, though his authority was quickly regained with a glare and a deduction of five points from his own house.

Scowling at the memory...he hated to be made to look like a fool...Severus sat down to grade the fourth-year essays. Halfway through Phineas Long's wordy and more-than-lengthy report on Gillyweed and its (apparently singular so far) use, he felt a tickling on his right arm. He didn't even look down.

"What do you want, Saffie?"

"Da-da," she crooned. "Pick me?"

"Daddy's grading essays, Saff. I cannot pick you up right now."

"Puweeeeeezze, Daddy?" she pouted.

"No, Saff. Go find your brother," he said, putting an end to the discussion.

He scanned the parchment to find where he had left off. Oh, there it was:

*Gillyweed is found in lots of places. Under rocks. In caves. In that big lake too except it is garded by this giant man eating squid and no-body in there right mind would try and get it from there. Thomas Rookwell almost had his left arm tore off last term when he through a rock into the lake and the Squid reched up and rapped his testicle around tight like one of those constrictor snakes. So I would not recomend any-one try it.*

The student's brilliance was simply astounding. Perhaps a snigger of Firewhisky would make this more palatable.

"Da-da?" the little voice piped from his side once more.

"What is it, Saff?" He felt a twitch of annoyance at being interrupted again, not to mention being brought back to reality from the irresistible lure of Firewhisky. Then, he decided that any interruption was better than continuing to read essays of this caliber.

"Kiss my baby." Saffie held her one-eyed, smudged, and worn rag doll up to be kissed. "Sean hurt her."

"Tell Sean to read his book, Saff. I'm too busy to kiss your dolly."

Pouting, Saffie turned and pounded out of the room. Dungeon floors were thankfully solid and did not resound too loudly at fits of childish temper. Her feet slapped petulantly instead, her hair flouncing with the effort. As soon as she crossed the threshold, he heard her scream, "Daddy said leave me alone!" before she slammed the door.

He shook his head and returned to the torturous essay.

*Gillyweed can be used for lots of things. You can breath under water if you eat it. My freind did that last summer when we went to the country on holiday. I wanted to try it but he ate it all. He was under water for like six hours. It took two days for the gills to ware off. My Aunt uses gilyweed in her garden to keep the nomes away. She says you have too keep all water far far away so when the nome eats the gillyweed he cant go under the water. Then he just flopps over dead because he cant brethe no longer.*

Severus swore and pressed the heels of his palms against his eye sockets. This was going to take bleeding forever. Several times he had implored the headmaster to employ an English professor to teach these children how to write a proper essay, but Dumbledore just patted his back, smiled, and offered him a lemon drop.

Five minutes later, Severus felt something brush against his robes beneath the desk. He peered between his legs and saw a pair of large brown eyes peering owlishly up at him.

"What are you doing down there, Saffie?" Severus felt the last particles of patience sift swiftly away.

"I'm doing my dollies," Saffie answered, offering up a handful of the infernal little dolls that Albus and Minerva insisted on buying her every time they went into Hogsmeade.

"Must you play with them here?" he asked. It was difficult enough to keep his concentration on the dull writings of the fourth-year dimwits without someone playing about his feet.

"Yes," she declared. "This dollies' house."

He groaned in exasperation. "All right, Saff. But do not bother Daddy, all right? I need to finish these bloody essays."

"Bloody is a bad word," wide eyes reprimanded him.

"Yes, Saff. Bloody is a bad word. Daddy is a bad man. Now be quiet and play with your toys," he said as he added a fair amount of red to the essay in front of him.

When would he give up and face facts? The students simply did not want to learn. For example...he should keep some of these to prove his point to Albus...what in Merlin's name was this?

*Gillyweed is made from rats tales. They must be gray rats or brown rats for it too work. White rats can only give there tales for wands I think. I think it probably tastes very much like seaweed because after you can go in the ocean and breath the water and eat all the seaweed you want. If you like that sort of thing like Filomena Platt. She does it all the time. She does lots of other stuff to. Any way the merpeople eat seaweed so I supose it in't so bad. I wonder if they have to eat gillyweed too. If they do how do they get the rats tales?*

Severus groaned at his misfortune and rubbed his temples. There was not enough red ink in the castle to correct these essays. He absentmindedly rummaged through the bottom drawer of his desk for another bottle. Hermione had told him to take on an apprentice to grade the lower-level essays, but so far he had refused. He was beginning to think she was right. It certainly would reduce his stress level.

*Oh, blast Merlin and his minions, where the bloody hell is that extra bottle of ink?* He yanked the bottom drawer nearly off its track to see if the bottle had been shoved inadvertently behind the extra quills. He bent lower to get a good look, when a rancid odor met his nose. Blinking tears back and calming his gag reflex, he sat back abruptly. Oddly, it smelled much like Hagrid's garden last summer after he fertilized it with...

"Mmmph! Saffie..." Severus bent to look under his desk, a hand protecting his very sensitive nose.

What looked back up at him was not his daughter. No, the thing...the creature...that looked back at him could not be his daughter. It had to be some dunderhead-induced hallucination brought on by looking at too many misspelled words or inhaling the fumes of the red ink. Suddenly, the hallucination grinned: pearly-white teeth shining through a blood-red, full-moon face.

"Nappies yucky," the creature announced, reaching out to grab him.

Severus pushed his chair back to evade the red, slippery grasp of his daughter. Her face, her hands and arms, her robes and her little dolly collection were entirely smeared with red ink. The now-empty bottle that he had been looking for lay guiltily on its side by his foot.

"So I smell," he said. "What have you done to yourself, little girl? You look like a ruddy Weasley!" He did not know whether to laugh or cry. It honestly was a perplexing dichotomy of feelings, one he was not accustomed to.

"I paint," she declared proudly. "It's red."

"It most certainly is." He looked hopelessly at his daughter who wore the last of his red ink. Perhaps he could ask Minerva for her spare bottle. No. The last thing he wanted was Minerva sniffing around; he was not going to be fodder for the rumour mill. Better yet, perhaps he should just use *green*.

Sighing in defeat, he bent to pick up his smeary and stinky daughter and headed for the loo. The smell almost made him gag. How he could have spent years witnessing torture, rape, and murder and still feel nauseous over a baby's dirty nappy was beyond him. He held her at arm's length as he passed by Sean who was lying on the floor engrossed in a book.

"Ugh!" the boy screamed, rolling over and holding a hand over his nose and mouth. "Stinky, smelly Saffie! Agony! I'm dying!"

"Stop being so dramatic," Severus called over his shoulder. "Just tell me what your mother does to clean this mess up."

"Scourgify!" he choked, still holding his nose and grabbing his gut. "If it's really, really bad, use a Portkey!" he yelled as his father slammed the door behind him.

Severus placed Saffie on the tile floor and stared at his red palms. The whiteness of her eyes and teeth amidst the red skin was unsettling. It reminded him of days best forgotten, bowing at the mercy of his serpentine Lord. A swish and a flick and a quick cleaning spell, and she looked like a little girl once again. However, she in no way smelled like one.

"When are you going to learn to use the loo?" He peered down at his daughter.

"I don' wanna," Saffie pouted. "Sean tol' me a snake'll bite me on my bum."

"Do me a favor and do not believe everything your brother says." Severus pointed his wand and decided to forego Scourgify for Evanesco. In an instant, the dirty nappy was gone. He summoned a clean nappy and stirred his wand above his head to freshen the air. It really was a wonder that something so small could produce such a putrid smell.

Shuttling his daughter back out into the sitting room, Severus nudged his son with the toe of his boot. "Watch... your... sister. I am going to ask Dobby to bring lunch down here. I am not being paid to be the lunchtime entertainment."

Anyway, how could he eat with everyone staring and smiling at him as though he were an animal in a Muggle zoo? He knew they were just hoping that one of his children would put a toe out of line. He knew that they relished the idea of discord in the Snape household. At least the students did. The faculty just smiled at him with something between amusement and pity. He hated that above all. Mostly because he couldn't take points from his co-workers.

Lunch in the dining area was a much simpler affair, much more *relaxing*, and he made a mental note to take all further meals this weekend in-quarters.

Afterward, Severus returned to his study, leaving the door ajar so he could hear if anything was amiss. His ankle twisted on the empty bottle of red ink as he moved to sit down. With a deep sigh, he banished the bottle, performed a cleaning spell on the scattered dollies, and Summoned them into their box before determinedly placing a bottle of green ink on his blotter to finish grading the essays. Green was infinitely easier on the eyes ... his eyes anyway.

The last essay topped them all. He wondered if perhaps sending a copy of these poorly written essays home to these students' parents would make much difference? Probably not. He had taught a fair number of their parents as well, and they hadn't written any better. It was a lost cause. Slashing the last few green marks across the page, he finally sat his quill on its rest and stretched out the kinks in his neck. The essays were finished, and now, he could enjoy the blissful silence.

Silence?

Severus leapt out of his chair and made it to the door before silence became nothing but a memory. With a crack, all hell broke loose. A cacophony of whizzes and zips and bangs and whirrs and bells pirouetted and ricocheted and echoed off the walls of the sitting room. He opened the door to an equally horrifying and magnificent sight: his sitting room being coated in the dust of an escaped Weasley Wildfire Whiz-bang.

Severus's exclamation got lost in the thunder of the fireworks. "What in blazes is going on here?!" If anyone had been watching...which they most certainly were not, due to there being something much more excited to look at...all they would have seen was his mouth angrily flexing and contorting in his increasingly reddening face.

Cavorting amidst the falling debris, his children screeched and laughed with delight, totally oblivious to the fact that their father stood glowering at them from the doorway. Severus knew all too well that Weasley Wildfire Whiz-bangs went out when they had exhausted themselves and were impervious to spells. He'd learnt that years ago, the day the infamous Weasley twins expelled themselves from Hogwarts. With no other options, he crossed his arms and waited on the periphery, not willing to get himself soiled, and cursed as a fiery finger licked a trail of ash across the front of his robes. Just *wait* until he got his hands on the sod who supplied his six-year-old with forbidden fireworks. His fists clenched at his sides as the pings and wheezes and shoots and bangs petered to a halt.

Saffie groaned, "Awww," and then turned around to see her Daddy's scowling face in the doorway.

"Uh-oh!" the two dust-covered children shrieked in unison as they turned tail and ran.

"Get back here, the BOTH OF YOU!" It felt so *good* to finally be *heard*.

With three long strides, he quickly caught up with the troublemakers, catching them by the necks of their robes. He pulled them into the bathroom where he was sure not to get anything else dirty. He wanted to scream. In fact, Hermione would have been proud at his restraint. The kids just stood there, silent and wide-eyed, waiting for the inevitable to happen.

But not this time. Suddenly, the anger focused, and his mind became as clear and as cold as ice. His voice, instead of increasing in volume and pitch, lowered to the deepest and most deadliest whisper. "Sean ... who gave you that Wildfire Whiz-bang?"

Knowing that one does not easily hold information from his father, and being too scared out of his wits to aggravate the man any further, Sean stuttered, "U-U-Uncle F-F-Fred."

"I see." Severus sat back on his haunches and surveyed the children before standing up. Scrutinizing his son, he ordered, "Clean yourself up and your sister, and I will see you in the sitting room when you are through." Then he stalked out of the room and slammed the door.

The sitting room was no longer a sitting room. To say it was a mess was a gross understatement. Amidst the ash from the burning fireworks were particles of multicolored spells that had exhausted themselves, spirals of some kind of burnt metal that had spun about the room and torn a few tapestries in their wake, and an odd assortment of confetti-like material.

Mouth set in a grim line, Severus set about cleaning up the mess, one spell at a time, and repairing the damage. He was only half finished by the time the kids reappeared. With a flick of his wand, the couch was cleared, and he ordered them to sit, which they did with breakneck speed. Not a word passed either of their lips as they watched their father fix the damage they had wrought.

Thirty minutes later, the job was finally done. Exhausted, Severus looked at the guilty expressions on Sean and Saffie's faces. He no longer had the energy to yell, even if he had wanted to.

"What were you thinking, Sean? You are aware that Wildfire Whiz-bangs are forbidden in our home. We told you that on your last birthday. The first thing you are going to do is hand over to me all the items you have from the twins' joke shop."

"But..." Sean sputtered in indignation.

"No 'buts,' Master Snape. The punishment fits the crime. Furthermore, there will be no purchase of items from their shop for six months. I am tempted to forbid you to even *look* at a member of the Weasley family for at least a year, but I'm afraid that would upset your mother. However, she will be apprised of the situation, and she will uphold my punishment as it stands. Now, for the other part of your punishments..." No, it was not over yet. "Saffie, you will sit in the corner by the fireplace for as long as it took me to clean this place up. That would be about an hour by my best guess. And Sean, you will get out your writing kit and write an essay no shorter than a half-parchment on how you failed to watch your little sister in a safe manner."

Neither child moved. Instead, they sat there with their mouths gaping open at his pronouncement. No complaints, just incredulity.

"Go. I need to rest for a bit. I will be back to check on your progress." Severus stood up, expecting them to do the same. When they didn't, he let out a sharp "NOW!" and they scrambled out of their seats to their ordered positions.

Heavy spell work was tiring. He needed a nap and hoped that after the punishment he just gave, he would have a little bit of time to recover. The second his head hit the pillow on his great, sadly-vacant, king-sized bed, he dozed off. Of course, he woke with a start less than ten minutes later...greatly relieved that it had only been ten minutes, worried that it had been more...after having an extraordinarily ridiculous dream about a dragon flying through the castle with his children on its back. *Bloody Weasleys*. Rubbing his eyes, he got up to check on the kids.

Pausing for a moment at the door, he heard muffled voices coming from the other side. Not even a quarter of an hour and his son was already defying his punishment. He opened the door to the sitting room only to find Sean's butt wiggling in front of the fireplace and Saffie leaning over so far in to see that he was sure she was going to fall through the Floo to the other side. Severus grabbed her just in time and yanked his son back simultaneously.

"Good afternoon, Professor," came the overly bright voice. A shag-headed, young man's face had replaced his son's bum. "How are things going with Hermione out of town?"

"Stop indulging me, Potter. No doubt Sean told you all about it. The children have apparently decided to take advantage of their mother being gone and are attempting to give me a difficult time. I, however, am managing *just fine*."

Harry smiled, though he dropped the false cheeriness from his tone. A hand ruffled through his hair. "Really, Professor. Hermione told me you may need help. My weekend is completely open; I could be there in a half-hour."

Severus put a halt to the children's cheers and pleads with a single hand. "No need, Mister Potter. I said I had matters under control. The last thing I need is more trouble; no doubt they have learned most of it from you and that sidekick of yours. Now, the children have punishments to fulfill. Good day." Severus cut off the Floo connection abruptly.

"Back in your seat, young man. You barely have twenty words on that parchment. Corner, Saffie."

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Thankfully, the hard work of the punishment, both the essay-writing and the corner-sitting, wore the children out. They both napped for a good hour and a half. Severus pattered around his lab, making lists of supplies that would have to be replenished next weekend in Diagon Alley. In the sudden calmness, he nearly forgot that Hermione was gone.

In fact, he *did* forget. The high-pitched screaming and laughter from the other room brought reality crashing back in on him. Sighing, he gave up his professional pursuits for his fatherly ones.

Thankfully, there was noise but no mayhem. The kids had woken from their naps and Sean had charmed some silly little red-furred doll with bulging eyes and a gigantic orange nose that Saffie had received last Christmas from Hermione's parents. It was dancing in a stiff-legged sort of way around the room and singing some obnoxiously repetitive song Severus remembered remotely from his own childhood.

Saffie was twirling madly and chanting over and over in what only a two-year-old could call a singing voice, "Ta rah, ta rah BUN dee ay! Ta rah, ta rah BUN dee ay!"

Severus shook his head and went to make himself a pot of tea. At least they weren't painting anything red, blowing anything up or killing each other. A little noise he could deal with at the moment.

Taking tea at his desk while the kids played in the other room could almost be seen as relaxing, he figured. After all, he didn't have to raise his voice, and he could hear if anything were to go monumentally wrong. After a while, the children...thankfully...got tired of the hellish song and went on to other endeavours.

"Sing *Rock-a-bye*, Saff," Severus heard Sean prod his sister from the other room.

Saffie squealed and complied. "Rock-a-bye bay-bee on a treetop! When a wind blow the cray-dull will rock. When a bow break, Saffie will fawl!" Her screech made Severus jump and run across the room. "And bruh-der will catch me, cray-dull and awl!"

Severus thought about scolding Sean for levitating his sister again, but he just couldn't bring himself to do it. He simply shook his head in disbelief and returned to ease the beginnings of another headache with more tea.

~~~~~o o~~~~~

An hour later, the headache was under control, and he sat reading the latest *Potions Quarterly* and half-listening to the chatter of the children in the other room. They weren't quiet, which was a good thing because silence usually spelled trouble. But they were talking and laughing and Severus was actually enjoying it for a change; he had always hoped for a relationship like that when he was young. A younger...or older...sister or brother that he could talk to and exchange secrets with, someone who would look out for him and vice versa.

It was the reason Severus had agreed to have a second child, the fact that he had never experienced such a relationship. He wanted Sean to have a different sort of childhood. He wanted his children to be happy and well-adjusted. He could only hope he was doing a good job. He knew that at least he provided a good home, and the children had a mother who exceeded his expectations in every way.

A knock on his study door drew his thoughts out of the past. "Enter," Severus called out automatically before he had a chance to remember the importance of avoiding visitors this weekend.

Minerva poked her head in the room. "Severus." She beamed at him maternally. "How are you doing? I brought something to keep Sean and Saffie occupied. I thought you could use the reprieve."

*Much too much like Albus*. He scowled. *Spoiling the children with gifts, putting her nose where it didn't belong*. She called out to the children before he even had a chance to respond, and they came running in to snatch the gifts out of her hand.

"Say thank you to Auntie Minerva," Severus reminded the children. They did so hastily and ran off to add another dolly to the collection and begin reading the latest book.

"Really, Minerva. You spoil them too much." His protestations were always ignored. He had no idea why he wasted his breath.

"Oh, Severus. Who else do I get to spoil? I have no grandchildren, and Sean and Saffie are just too precious *not* to spoil. Now, tell me, how are you getting on without Hermione, dear? Would you like me to take the children off your hands for a couple hours?"

"What? And return them to me loaded with sweets, too high on sugar to sit still for five minutes? No thank you, Minerva. I am doing just fine. Anyone who told you differently was lying." He was a little worried that perhaps Potter had spoken with her.

"Who would have told me differently, Severus? Is there something I should know?" Minerva was entirely too intuitive, which was probably why she was Deputy Headmistress.

"No, there is nothing you should know, Minerva. Thank you for giving the children something to occupy their time, and thank you for stopping by." He hoped that would be enough to see her out the door.

"All right, dear. But do let me know if you require assistance. I'll be more than happy to help." Minerva looked wistfully at the half-closed sitting room door.

*Honestly, you would think she wanted something to go wrong, the way she is acting* he thought as he made sure she made it completely out the door. Shutting it behind him, he went to check on the kids before settling in to read the rest of the article.

They were not in the sitting room. Nor were they in their rooms. Now where could they have gone? He began a systematic search, thinking that perhaps they were playing a joke on him. They couldn't have left the quarters. He had wards that notified him if anyone entered or left, and they were still in place.

Nevertheless, he began to panic when his search turned up nothing. "Sean? Saffie? This is not funny. You both come out right now!" He was certain Sean hadn't learned

the Disillusionment Charm yet. He had threatened Filius within a millimetre of his life if he even dared to teach Sean that one. But Sean was quite advanced for his age and loved to read; it was entirely within the realm of possibility that he learned it himself. Without an answer, he decided to start in Sean's room once more and search a little more thoroughly this time.

When he entered his son's room the second time, he heard a hushed voice coming from behind the bed. He listened more closely.

"I mean it, Saff! Shut up or Dad'll hear us! And don't you dare throw up. I don't want my hiding place smelling like tossed-up Top-Offs!"

Thinking back on it, Severus would have to admit that the element of surprise was not the wisest approach in all situations: namely, where Weasley's Technicolor Top-Offs were concerned. He never knew there were so many colors possible in the spectrum. And the volume!

Mentally kicking himself for forgetting to confiscate his son's contraband, he placed both kids fully clothed in the bathtub and went to make himself a large pot of tea before beginning another round of cleaning spells. This was going to be a long night.

~ End Day Two

## 3. Day Three

*Chapter 3 of 3*

If there were only one thing that could make his weekend worse...

*"Day Three"*

The first Weasley that got within arm's length, he was going to strangle. The aftereffects of the Technicolor Top-Offs lasted well into the early hours of the morning. Every time Severus thought the ordeal was over, he was summoned once again by either Sean or Saffie...usually one right after the other: a horrid, multicolored, never-ending circle. After a while, he decided that it wasn't even worth going to bed, much less bother getting comfortable. It made more sense to just brew a pot of tea and sacrifice the remaining two hours of sleep he would have normally had.

He brewed an exceptionally strong pot and poured himself a cup, collapsing into a chair at the small table where they sometimes took their family meals. His sleep-deprived mind wandered over the weekend without Hermione. He missed her terribly; having to deal with two sick children all by himself had him missing her even more.

His drowsy, Hermione-ridden thoughts were broken by a scratching at the window. Reaching over, he unhooked the latch and, like an answer to a prayer, a small, tawny owl flew in and perched itself on the sill, holding out its leg. Severus unfastened the parchment and opened it to read.

*Dearest Severus,*

*I hope this letter finds everything well. I miss you all so very much. Although, I must admit, my lecture was a hit, and I had so much fun giving it and answering all the questions. You wouldn't believe the amount of talent that has shown up to this conference. I'll tell you all about it tonight.*

*I take it from the lack of any correspondence that you and the kids are doing fine without me. Like I said, do not hesitate to ask Harry for help. He wouldn't mind. It would give the kids a chance to play with James and Evan.*

*All my love,*

*Hermione*

He snorted. James and Evan: the Potter twins. They had managed to reach the ripe old age of seven, but already he could tell they were another Fred and George in the making. Not only were they pranksters of the highest caliber, they were darn good at manipulating people to get exactly what they wanted. If they weren't the product of two overly-Gryffindor parents, he would definitely sort them into Slytherin if he had any choice in the matter. Sean and the twins were inseparable whenever they were together. They also ignored Saffie, which made her very unhappy.

No. He would *not* resort to having the Boy Wonder save the day. If he could live through fireworks and a double bathroom-running, Top-Off-expelling, child-washing triathlon, he was certain he could take on just about anything. The thought of asking for help made his insides want to shrivel up. If there were only one thing that could actually make this weekend worse, it would be Potter and the miniature trouble-making duo.

Severus' head jerked up at a sharp knock at the door, realizing that he had dozed off. He looked down at his untouched tea, now room temperature, and sighed. In his exhausted and somewhat shaky state, he did not trust himself to aim a warming spell properly, so he placed the teakettle back on the stove to heat. Then, he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and listened for any sounds coming from the children's rooms. Thankfully, it was silent ... until the rapping at the door broke it again. Apparently, whoever it was, was not about to go away.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake," he grumbled and crossed the sitting room to open the door.

"Good morning, Severus!" The headmaster grinned at the younger man, much-too-much overly cheerful for this time of morning. Then, noticing Severus' wan look, he sobered just a little. "Are you all right, my boy? You look positively terrible."

"I'm fine, Albus," Severus answered, holding back a yawn. "What do you need?" Normally, he would let Albus into their quarters, but in no way was he going to allow him to remain any longer than necessary this morning.

"We missed you at breakfast. Where are the children? I have sweets for them." Albus held out two bags of candy, at which Severus felt slightly nauseous, having seen enough of sweets...albeit not the more pleasant side...to last probably an entire lifetime.

"Save them for tomorrow, Albus. I don't think they'll want them today."

"Not want them? Are they all right?" Albus asked, his eyes widening a little with concern.

"They're fine now, no thanks to my son's vast collection of Weasley's Technicolor Top-Offs, which were vastly diminished by the time I discovered them." Severus did yawn



this time. "I have gotten absolutely no sleep except for a few minutes over my tea right before you knocked."

"I'm so sorry, my boy," Albus said, the concern now radiating across his features, wrinkling his brow. "Is there anything I can do? Do you need Minerva to come by and watch over things while you get some sleep?"

"I most certainly do *not* want Minerva to stop by and hang around my quarters like a mother hen. That's the *last* thing I need this morning," Severus warned the old man. "I just want to drink my tea and get this place straightened up a bit before Hermione gets home tonight."

"Most understandable," Albus agreed. "Still, you better get some sleep before now and then. You look an absolute fright, Severus. If it's one thing I know about women: no matter how difficult a time you've had watching over the children, whatever you do, don't let it show." He winked at the younger man.

"I'll take that into consideration, Albus. Thank you." Severus began to close the door. Why did it always take so much effort to make Albus go away? All the man wanted to do was keep talking, and all Severus wanted to do was sit down...better yet, lie down...and take a proper nap.

"No problem, my boy. If you need anything, send a house-elf, and I'll be here straightaway."

Finally free to shut the door, he collapsed against it. Hearing the sounds of shuffling feet, he turned around to find Sean and Saffie stumbling bleary-eyed into the sitting room.

"Who was that? Papa Albus?" Sean asked, falling onto the sofa. The boy's face was a mirror image of how Severus felt.

"Yes," Severus answered and then decided he wanted to have a bit of fun. "He came by to give you each a bag of sweets. They looked *really* good this time. Some of Honeyduke's finest..."

The groans from the two children made him smirk. He had to make sure that the children had learned their lesson well. In no way did he want a repeat of last night.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "If you really want the sweets, I'm sure you could still catch Albus in the hallway."

"No!" the children yelled in unison.

"All I want to do is sleep," Sean complained.

"Yes. Well, I suppose that would be nice, but your mother is coming home today, and I would prefer if she knew very little of the trouble you gave me this weekend. Ah, which reminds me: You haven't surrendered your Weasley's joke shop stash yet. Why don't you go get that for me now?"

Sean reluctantly dragged himself off the sofa, grumbling under his breath, and trudged to his bedroom. Saffie got up to follow close behind, a habit she had that always made Severus shake his head in amusement. The girl was attached to Sean like a shadow, and woe to the person who tried to remove her.

Allowing his fatherly posture to relax for a moment, he went to turn the heat off under the mostly evaporated pot of tea. There was enough for a single cup, but one was better than none.

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Half an hour later, he decided a long draught of Pepperup Potion was in order. He began an intense search of cabinets and cupboards, too lazy to make a Floo-call to Poppy. He didn't want to be caught asking anyone for help. It was best to avoid questions...especially where Poppy was concerned. He could just see the leery concern lining her face as she searched his children's eyes for any signs of illicit potion dosings. No, thank you. Finally, he found a relatively small but serviceable sample of Pepperup Potion hidden in one of his desk drawers and, sighing, drank every last drop.

The children seemed to be fine. They had come into the kitchen for some tea and toast and retreated...thankfully...back to Sean's room. Sean had delivered his box of contraband and was told that he'd get it back...maybe...after Severus had a lengthy discussion with Hermione. It hadn't made Sean happy, but he knew enough to keep his complaints to himself at this point. Severus suspected the boy was simply too tired to argue.

The only sound coming from Sean's room now was low-key conversation, which Severus could only hope meant that they weren't getting into any trouble. He contemplated checking on them, but then he didn't want to distract them if they were doing something harmless. He desperately needed some time to himself. In any case, he thought the probability was pretty high that they were staying out of trouble.

That is, until he heard Sean say in an urgent whisper, "Catch them!"

Suddenly, Severus was quite alert. His ears perked in the direction of Sean's room, and it was unmistakable that something was happening. He edged toward the door.

"You opened the box, Saff! Why'd you do that? Dad's gonna *kill* me!" Sean whispered louder, trying not to alert his father.

Scrambling and scuffling sounds escaped from just beyond the door. Then, just as he was about to look around the corner and catch his children doing whatever it was they were doing, a pair of ... somethings ... scuttled under his feet. Then another pair and three more made a similar escape at top speed. Suddenly, the floor was swarming with small, black, multi-legged creatures, all having apparently decided that Sean's room was simply too confining.

"What in the name of Slytherin is going on here?!" Severus bellowed.

The children screamed and made for opposite ends of the room, cowering, eyes wide with fear. Severus looked at the steady stream of creatures all coming from a half-exposed box under Sean's bed. Aiming his wand, Severus began to utter the word "*Evanesco*" when Sean screamed, "No, don't! You'll kill them!"

"That's *exactly* what I intend to do!" Severus roared at his son. "What in the world is this ... this infestation?!"

Sean stuttered, "It...it's...I don't know what they're called! Hagrid gave one to me. It's not my fault!"

"You've been harboring wild creatures in our quarters...wild creatures given to you by Hagrid, no less? And you don't even know what *its*?" Severus shook his head in disbelief, aimed his wand and began shouting "*Evanesco*!" repeatedly.

It worked, although it was slow going, and there were just too many for it to be efficient. Sean just stood in the doorway sobbing, "Don't kill them. They're just babies!"

Severus started his lecture in between spell-casting. "You're going to get yourself in big trouble someday if you harbor the kind of creatures Hagrid catches. Merlin knows where he found these. I've never seen anything like them," Severus grumbled. "*Evanesco! Evanesco!*"

He had vanished about half of the miniature creatures when there was a knock at the door. Of all the times for someone to call, this had to be the worst. If it was Minerva, Severus was going to hex Albus' beard green. The small creatures were tumbling and crawling into every crevice they could find, crawling up curtains, disappearing under chairs, trying to escape the power of Severus' wand.

Severus swore under his breath. "Why does everyone have to pick this morning for a bloody visit?"

He stalked to the door, eradicating a few more of the pesky creatures on the way, and threw it open with a snarl. Standing on the other side was none other than Harry

Potter and the twins.

"Well, if it isn't the Boy Wonder," Severus growled.

"At your service, Batman." Harry grinned as the boys ran inside and made for Sean's bedroom.

"Aw, cool!" Evan shouted, taking in the scene. "It had babies! I told you he was a girl!"

"Nah, Hagrid said the boys *and* girls can have babies," James said.

Severus turned back to Harry. "Who told you I needed your service?" he asked, already quite wise as to who it was.

"Only Dumbledore. We happened to be in the castle for breakfast this morning," Harry said as he walked into the sitting room, glancing around as the little black things climbed up the walls and walked across the ceiling. They seemed to be multiplying, though Severus couldn't be absolutely sure.

"What a coincidence." Severus knew it was no coincidence. Apparently, his son's little Floo-call had done the trick. Harry never came to breakfast if Hermione wasn't here to join him. Although, Hermione was very rarely not here, so he really had nothing to compare it with. Still, it wasn't a coincidence at all; of that he was sure.

"Mm-hmm," Harry continued not-so-innocently. "And then Albus mentioned something about Sean and Saffie being sick and..."

"Now, that really *is* a coincidence, Mr. Potter," Severus interrupted. "Sean apparently had quite a collection of Technicolor Top-Offs, thanks to your brothers-in-law. Not to mention, Fred had gone behind my back to sneak Sean a Wildfire Whiz-bang, which they let loose in the sitting room yesterday afternoon. It was a Weasley sort of day yesterday, one that I certainly do *not* wish to repeat."

Harry's uneasy grin fell off his face at the mention of a Whiz-bang loose indoors. "You must be kidding," he said.

"Have you *ever* known me to be kidding?" Severus asked. "And just so you are aware, the children are forbidden anything from the Weasley's joke shop for six months. Maybe more after the Top-Off fiasco. If I had my way, I'd forbid contact with *any* Weasley..." He let that hang in the air between them.

"Ah, but James and Even have wound their way into your heart, eh? They're only half-Weasley, though, so you could always exempt them."

"Yes, but they're half-Potter, so I don't think that I would," he sneered. "Anyway, Hermione would most likely veto that decision, even if Sean blew up the entire castle with the latest Weasley brainchild."

"Lucky for me, I guess." Harry was back to grinning, no doubt finding all of this very amusing. "Anyway, back to this ... this ... well, what in the world happened?" Harry gestured to the burgeoning force of creatures, eradicating any doubt of their instantaneous breeding capabilities.

"Apparently, Hagrid happened. He gave Sean *something* that he cannot remember the name of. Not that it matters. Saffie opened the box and now our quarters have been invaded. Remind me to personally thank Hagrid later today," Severus said, tacking on a few rounds of "*Evanesco!*"

Harry grimaced and joined in the fray, while Sean, James and Evan shouted their objections. Blissfully aware no one was paying attention to her, Saffie bounced on the sofa, doing somersaults and cackling with glee as the creatures snapped, crackled and popped into nonexistence. Between Severus and Harry, they eliminated the rest of the creatures...the visible ones at any rate. Severus hoped that if they missed any, the remaining ones wouldn't try to exact revenge for any deceased siblings...or worse yet, begin to multiply once more.

"That about does it." Harry wiped perspiration from his brow. "Why don't you go rest for a while or take a shower. You look awful. I can watch over the boys and Saffie."

"As much as I thoroughly *enjoy* your company, I'm really not in the mood for any today," Severus said, hoping he could cut Harry's visit short. "I thank you for all your help, and not to appear rude, but the door is over there." He pointed firmly and, he hoped, authoritatively. Though, he feared his authority had been severely eroded where Mr. Potter was concerned ever since he married Hermione.

"Oh, come on. You really don't want Hermione to find out about all that has gone on here this weekend, do you? If you look clean and rested, she won't suspect a thing." Harry winked ... too Albus-like for his taste.

Severus eyed him suspiciously. "Which is why you will be gone by the time she gets home."

"Not on your life, Professor. I want to see the look on her face when she walks in the door and sees me here." Harry smirked. "Anyway, she'll be proud of you for calling me instead of giving them a dose of Dreamless Sleep like you did last time."

"*Almost* did last time. And I did *not* call you!" Severus yelled over his shoulder. He headed off to the bath, murmuring, "Damn, bloody Albus always meddling in matters he shouldn't ... should keep his beard in his own business...."

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Hermione walked in the door and called out, "I'm home!"

Saffie came barreling through the door and tackled her mother's legs, wrapping her arms tightly around them. "Mummy! Sean gave me Top-Offs!" the small girl admitted immediately.

Hermione winced at the girl's admission and tried to pry Saffie's small hands loose from her thighs. She had to resort to stalking across the room stiff-legged with the little girl attached. She reached the door to the sitting room, breathless and laughing, before she called out to her husband.

"Severus? Where are you?"

"He's in here with me, Hermione," Harry called out.

"I told you not to say anything," Severus growled.

Hermione walked through to the sitting room, throwing Severus a silent "help me" look, barely able to take another step. She smiled at Severus' scowl and Harry's not-so-innocent grin and laughed.

"Harry! So good to see you. So is this a welcome-home visit, or did Severus call you?"

"Um, actually, it's neither. Though I do welcome you home." He grinned cheekily.

Severus came over and picked Saffie off her mother's legs, giving Hermione a peck on the cheek. The girl twisted in his arms and reached for her mother.

"I want my mummy," she pouted.

"Go to your mummy," he answered, depositing the child in her mother's arms. "Potter is here at the headmaster's request *Not* mine."

"Oh," she said with a knowing smirk. "And what was this I heard about Top-Offs?"

Severus rolled his eyes. "Oh, for Merlin's sake!" he exclaimed. "Fine! That was the highlight of our weekend. Actually, no, it wasn't. The Wildfire Whiz-bang set loose in the sitting room actually was a bit more spectacular than the Technicolor vomit your children spewed all night. But," he said as he looked over at a smirking Harry sitting over on the sofa, "let's not forget the infestation of gods-knows-what thanks to that overgrown oaf of a groundskeeper or, I nearly forgot, Saffie ripping all my research to shreds and painting her body and dollies red with my correcting ink. It's been a thoroughly exciting ... and thoroughly taxing weekend. Wish you'd been here to enjoy it with me," he added blandly.

For a moment, Hermione was struck speechless, her mouth opening once or twice as though to say something. In the end, instead of words coming out, she broke down in peals of laughter that had actually Saffie reaching for her father, a crease of worry in her small brow.

"Is Mummy happy?" she asked her daddy, not entirely sure as her mother was now doubled over, a hand grabbing the stitch in her side and tears running down her face.

"Too happy," Severus replied.

He glared at Harry who dared to join in the laughter. Severus had a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn't be long before everyone knew about his weekend alone with his children. His grandchildren would probably hear about it years from now, over and over and bloody over. He sighed. Perhaps he should have just administered the Dreamless Sleep Potion and dealt with the consequences... In any case, thank the gods Hermione was home.

~End