



From that point, the nights they spent together talking about everything and nothing became more and more frequent, until one day, when they were saying their good nights, she stepped on her tiptoes and brushed her lips to his in a brief and hesitant kiss. That changed everything for them, especially for him. He'd had few and brief experiences with women and wasn't sure how to react, so he did the only thing he knew to do, thanks to doubt: he ran away. But Hermione wouldn't take that for an answer, and she went to get the explanation she deserved and to force him to face his feelings. He both cursed and blessed the day she'd come looking for what she wanted and took it when she'd kissed him again. This time, he didn't run away. On the contrary, he stayed there with her and learned how to love a woman.

They got married two years later, and Severus felt, for the first time, at peace with himself. He still looked at Hermione and felt amazed that he still saw the girl he had taught, but he also saw the woman she had become. Little had changed in her; she was still one of the brightest people he knew, and sometimes, she was the most annoying one. He never complained about it because, for all her stubbornness and annoyingness, Hermione had a dozen qualities that overcame her flaws. He found her beautiful and reluctantly admitted, only to her, that she was sexy. Years had tamed the youthful impulsiveness of her acts, but not her passion about things she cared about. Severus was secretly proud of the sarcastic streak she had developed and barely refrained from smirking when he heard her scolding Potter and Weasley about their lack of common sense despite the years that had passed.

He was also the same person, still snarky and harsh with the world, but his heart had stopped being bitter and hard. He had returned to his former position in Hogwarts, the one he had always wanted. With Voldemort's death, the curse over the DADA post had ended, and Severus could return to Hogwarts to resume his post as the DADA teacher and Head of Slytherin. His demeanour toward the students didn't change; he was still unpleasant and mean with those who didn't meet his expectations. He no longer occupied a chamber in the dungeons; instead, he retired to his house in Hogsmeade after his daily classes to have dinner with his wife. From time to time, Minerva invited Hermione to dinner at Hogwarts, but he preferred to be alone with her in the evenings.

He could never have enough of the woman he loved, and holding Hermione near his body while he kissed her was definitely his favourite hobby. One night, after four years of marriage, they were laying in bed, his hands lazily caressing her skin while he kissed her all over again, despite being practically drained. He encircled her waist to pull her nearer to him and buried his face in her hair preparing to sleep when it happened, the night that changed his life all over again.

"Severus? Are you awake?"

"No, I'm sleeping, and you should do the same."

When she knew that he was indeed awake, she turned in his embrace to face him. "Severus, I want a baby."

That statement fully awakened him. Severus let her go and sat in the bed looking at her as if she had suddenly lost her mind. "What did you say?"

Her expression changed when she heard him; she sat also, not even bothering to cover her breasts, and looked him straight in the eyes so he could see the seriousness of her statement.

"I said that I want a baby. I want to get pregnant and be a mother. What's wrong with that?"

What was wrong? A lot of things were wrong in his opinion. Firstly, it was the fact that he didn't like children. In fact, they bothered him. Also, they were happy together as they were. Why couldn't she be satisfied only with him and what he gave her? And he didn't want to share her, to see all her attention devoted to a baby and not to him. But above all, there was the fact that he had never known what a good father should be. He didn't have a good father, didn't know how it worked, so he wasn't sure he could do something he had never known how to do. He hated not being perfect, and he always excelled in every task he engaged with. Definitely a baby wasn't in his plans and never would be.

He scowled at her before answering her question. "Well, Hermione, do you want a list of all the wrong things about this, or is it plainly obvious enough for you?"

"There's nothing wrong with having a baby, and definitely there are no obvious reasons to think it is."

"I'm appalled, my dear. Your brilliant mind seems to have forgotten your years in Hogwarts and my fondness of children."

"But it will be different, *darling*, because we're talking about your child, not about a student."

"Hermione, are you forgetting what I told you about my childhood? How do you expect me to be a father when I have no idea what it means?"

Hermione sighed. It seemed as if she had come to the realization that Severus was actually scared to death of the idea of not being adequate for parenthood. She had to make him see things as she saw them, to make him understand why she wanted a family. She moved to settle in his arms, which he opened willingly for his wife, despite the fact that they were in the middle of a discussion.

"Severus, you'll never be a bad father; you'll love our child. Besides, we'll do this together, and we'll do it as we do everything else, simply the best way we can. I love you; you mean everything to me, and you will always be the most important person in my life. But I need this; I need to have a family of my own. I want to carry your baby, to have something we both created because we love each other."

Her eyes were pleading with him to give her what her heart desired, to make her happier than she already was. She had said she'd love him the same, even if they had a child, but he was still unsure about his role as a father. But she was right about having a family, even he had wished to have one at some point of his life, so it wouldn't be wrong if they actually did it, right?

"We'll have a family, Hermione. But only one child, no more."

She clung to his neck, covering him with kisses. "Thank you, thank you, my love."

Her lips found his, and her body pressed into his. His hands went immediately to her waist, pulling her to his lap, their closeness deepening the kiss and arousing them both. Then in a sudden motion, Hermione pushed him into the mattress, straddling him and smiling mischievously.

"I guess we should start with this task as soon as possible. Don't you agree?"

He didn't have a chance to answer her when her lips descended over his, so he let his hands talk for him. After all, the idea of the process of having a baby was suddenly very appealing for him.

After four months of trying, Hermione finally got pregnant. He had heard several times that pregnant women always looked radiant, but unfortunately this statement didn't apply to Hermione. She always looked sick and pale, and nausea kept her in the loo during the first three months. The Healer had said her pregnancy was going fine, but that she had to take better care of herself and reduce her activity. Hermione was utterly disappointed. None of her activities were unnecessary, and she needed to be active, her nature demanded it.

Of course she didn't follow the rules set by the Healer when it suited her own purposes and sneaked from their house to go to the Ministry or to do research in their laboratory. Of course that made her feel tired and weak, and he had to take care of her and brew potions for her pain. After some time, she stopped being so stubborn and followed the indications for the sake of their baby. When she started craving food, it was sheer torture for him. First, she had a craving for black pudding, which she had always claimed to hate since her childhood, and over her last few months, she'd had a craving for ice cream. He had gone to Tesco too many times, even minutes before they closed, to look for a container of Ben & Jerry's Homemade Chocolate Fudge Brownie Ice Cream for her. For around four months, she'd craved her ice cream and even cried when he didn't go and get it for her. He always left the place furious with his wife and cursing any Muggle who dared to cross his way. But he had to admit that the trip was worth it when he returned home to see her smile brightly when she saw the ice cream and then kissed him, conveying all the love she felt for him, and the gratitude for bringing her favourite ice cream.

Hermione have never been overweight, but she was more curvy than most of the women her age. Severus had always thought she had the perfect body, not like the skinny

girls that looked as if a small breeze would blow them away. But during her pregnancy, she had gained a little more weight than the Healer suggested. Her belly was very rounded, but her hips hadn't widened. If someone looked at her from behind, it was hard to tell she was pregnant. He had never admitted it, but he found her more beautiful that way, even with her now pale cheeks and the dark circles under her eyes due to lack of sleep. Hermione always slept face down, with her body over his chest and her head snuggled in his shoulder, but since her belly had started rounding, she'd found it hard to sleep because she had to remain on her side or her back. He missed feeling her breasts pressed against his chest, but the feel of her soft belly against his or the feel of her arse against his groin was worth it, despite the fact that intimacy between them had diminished in the last couple of months.

She had had a tough time with her pregnancy, but he had suffered as well. He had neglected his personal research in order to spend more time with her, soothing her and fulfilling her whims. He had never complained about being with her, but definitely there were more delightful ways to spend the time with his wife. Today was one of those days in which she was quiet in their living room, reading a book while he worked in their lab. He was concentrating on measuring the exact amount of Mandrake root when it happened.

"Severus?"

He knew that the past hours of silence were just too good to last for the entire day. "What is it now, Hermione? Do you need a potion for your pain, need a massage on your feet, or simply want me to spend some 'quality time' with you and our child?"

"Stop being such a prat, Severus. You know how being pregnant works." She ran her hands caringly over her belly in a protective gesture. "Besides, you know that in the book we read it said that both parents must talk to the baby and that the father has to be considerate with the mother because she is in terrible stress."

"My apologies, *my love*, but I fail to see where it mentioned that I have to devote every moment of the day to attend to your needs."

"You well know that the Healer said my pregnancy was quite difficult and that I needed to be pampered. We're not having this discussion again, Severus. Besides, I came here to tell you something else."

"What is it, Hermione?"

"I started having steady contractions. I think it's time."

Severus just looked at her when he heard her news; he had expected one of her weird requests, like when she asked him to practice some odd breathing techniques that she said would help her when the moment came. Severus had always had a quick response to every situation that arose, but this time, he just stood there frozen and staring at his wife.

"Severus? Did you hear me? I said it's time to go to St. Mungo's."

Suddenly, realisation hit him and he reacted. "What are you doing standing there? Let's go now. I'll go to grab your things, and you wait for me in the living room. Where is the Portkey? Have you been doing that breathing thing? Come on, woman, we have to hurry."

"Severus, calm down, we have had everything ready for two weeks now. It's about time this little one decided to arrive. Besides, my contractions are still bearable."

Severus tried to process what she was telling him. He had never felt like this, like his brain had lost its ability to work properly. Well, perhaps he felt the same the first time she'd kissed him, but that was beside the point. And her calm demeanour didn't help; it made him feel more anxious, as if he was the only one realising what was going on there.

"Whatever, Hermione. Come on. We have to go now." He tried to rush her through the door of the lab while he spoke.

"Aren't you going to cast a Stasis Charm on your potion?"

"You're right." He turned to quickly cast the charm over the cauldron and returned to hurry Hermione. "Done. Can we go now?"

"Oh, I haven't Flooed Ginny. I told her I'd tell her when the moment arrived."

"Hermione, why do you need to Floo Mrs. Potter? That is completely unnecessary, and we're already late."

"We can't be late. This is not an appointment. And I told Ginny I'd tell her when the time arrived, just as she told me when her twins arrived; you know how excited they are. Besides, Ginny and Harry will be our baby's godparents."

"Don't even remind me about that." Hermione had not only convinced him to have a baby, she'd even managed to make him accept Harry Bloody Potter as his child's godfather. Damn woman! She knew too well how to push the right buttons to get what she wanted. He would have wagered anything that if she weren't a Muggle-born, she would have been a Slytherin.

"Just Floo Ginny, okay? Let's go now. My contractions are getting worse."

"Are you in pain? Should I carry you?"

"No, I still can walk, thank you very much, but it would be a good idea to go."

"Right." Severus took the silver bell that acted as a Portkey and activated it with the tip of his wand so that they could go.

They didn't arrive in St. Mungo's regular reception area; they arrived in a separated ward in which non-magical issues were taken care of. There were also rows of rickety wooden chairs there, full of witches and wizards waiting for their turn to see a Healer. Severus hastily walked towards the enquiries desk to talk to the witch in turn.

"My wife is in labour, she is having contractions, and her water broke. She needs immediate assistance from a Healer."

The witch looked at him boringly, not impressed about his demands. "What is your wife's Healer's name?"

"Healer Wilkins," Hermione answered the witch when she joined him in front of the desk, "and he had asked me to Floo him as soon as possible when I started labour. He said you'd know where to find him."

"Yeah, we'll Floo him and let you know when he arrives. In the meantime, a mediwitch will come to guide you to a room."

"We can't wait here until a mediwitch arrives. Don't you see my wife is in pain and about to have a baby? She needs..." But when Severus turned to Hermione, he saw that she was walking away from the desk to wait for the mediwitch patiently.

"Well, sir, I see your wife can barely stand the pain, so why don't you go and comfort her? Next!"

Severus sighed and went join Hermione resignedly. He couldn't believe they'd make them wait when she was about to have a baby. A baby. Now that he could do nothing but wait, he started realising the implications of that statement. Hermione was having a baby, his child. How did he get into this madness? He wouldn't be a good father; he didn't know what being a good father meant. He...

"Severus! Did you hear me?"

He was taken out of his reverie to stare at Hermione, wondering what she had just said. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"I said that the mediwitch is here, and they are moving me to a room. The public Floo is available over there. You should Floo Ginny and Harry while we wait for the Healer"

He reluctantly agreed and went to the Floo to contact the damned boy who still haunted his life. He had managed to become more civil for the sake of Hermione, but that didn't mean he could stand the Potters. It seemed that history always tended to repeat itself when he saw the dark-haired wizard finally tying the knot with the red-haired witch. So like his parents...

After some minutes, the Potters joined them in Hermione's room. Both witches were chatting amicably, like they hadn't seen each other in ages, while Severus was left with Harry.

"So, are you ready to be a father, Snape?"

He could only snort at the question, hiding the fact that he wasn't indeed ready for it. In fact, he wasn't sure at all about that parenthood issue. Fortunately, he hadn't had to answer as a beaming, tall man in his sixties wearing lime-green robes joined them.

"Good afternoon, everyone. How's my favourite patient doing today? Are we ready to bring this little one into the world?" Healer Wilkins was too cheerful in Severus' opinion, but he was one of the best Healers, and he cared a lot about Hermione.

"I'm doing fine; in fact, the contractions are still bearable but getting more steady."

"That's great, Hermione. Why don't I check on your progress?"

Finally! About bloody time someone cared about his wife and the whole situation. Severus and the Potters moved away from Hermione's bed to give Healer Wilkins space to check on her.

The silence between them was starting to be uncomfortable when Ginny decided to attempt small talk. "Have you told Hermione's parents?"

"Of course we did. We had an owl ready with the news; I just had to release the bird before we left the house. As you well know, Muggles are not allowed in St. Mungo's, so they'll wait for us to return home."

"That's good. They must be mad about their first grandchild, especially since Hermione is their only daughter. I bet you're also very excited about it. I remember that Harry was just crazy about the twins when they were born. Do you remember, Harry?"

The younger Potter smiled at the memory and nodded to his wife. "Yeah, it was one of the happiest moments in my life."

"Do you prefer a girl or a boy? Hermione told me she already has a list of names for both cases, but she never mentioned a final decision. What do you think, any favourite names?"

He just mumbled something intelligibly, but that didn't discourage Ginny, who continued chatting.

"She also told me you have decided to have only one child. I think you might reconsider it since neither of you have siblings. It's just natural to wish different for your child. Well, whatever it is, I bet the child will be just brilliant with you two as its parents. It's only natural, sir." After all these years, Ginny still called Severus 'sir.' She just didn't feel it was right to call him Severus or Snape as Harry did, and Professor was completely ridiculous.

"I just hope my godchild becomes a Gryffindor. That would be great. Don't you agree, Snape?"

This time, Severus didn't even attempt to answer them. Hearing about his child and Gryffindors in the same sentence was simply ridiculous. Once again, the silence was broken, but this time, it was interrupted when Healer Wilkins approached them. Severus moved immediately to his side when he saw the seriousness in the man's features.

"What is it? Is she all right? Is something wrong?"

"Calm down, Severus. She's fine. It's only that your child is having problems coming. Hermione's body is not reacting well, and the contractions aren't coming as quickly as they should. The problem is that the water has already broken, and the baby is now dealing with a change of environment that isn't healthy for him. I have to help them both and induce the birth. If I don't do it, then both will be in pain."

Severus just nodded. "Just do what you have to do, but keep my Hermione safe."

"I will keep them both safe. Don't worry about it." The man just patted his shoulder and left them to join Hermione again.

Severus didn't feel like listening to the Potters' babbling about babies, so he excused himself with the pretext of needing something to drink. He needed time to think, to try to cope with the imminent birth of his child.

He'd seen the expression on Potter's face when he remembered the birth of his children. He'd been simply beaming with happiness and pride for his children. Severus was sure that he didn't show the same expression when he thought about his child. In fact, he thought he showed a sour expression when he thought about it. How was he supposed to be a good father if he couldn't even feel joyful about it?

He shouldn't have let Hermione convince him to have a child. They were perfectly happy alone; they didn't need more in their life. He dreaded the long hours people always said had to be devoted to taking care of a child. They used to spend nights together reading, working on potions, or simply snuggling by the fire. They could go wherever they wanted, whenever they pleased. And Severus didn't forget that he could have her and love her in any place of the house when they felt like making love. Everything about their life together as he knew it would be over with the arrival of the baby, and that annoyed him because he was used to having Hermione only for him.

He needed the love that Hermione gave him; he needed it because he had never been loved like that before, not even by his parents. Suddenly memories of his childhood filled his mind, of his abusive father and his uncaring mother. They were so wrapped in their own problems that they didn't pay attention to their son, how he'd grown up in the middle of their love-hate relationship. He was certain that his parents had loved each other at some point, but they also ended up hating each other. What if he turned into the man Tobias had been? He was certain that Hermione wasn't like Eileen, and so in that case, history wouldn't repeat itself, but he couldn't be sure about himself. No child deserved to have a father like the one he had, and he was afraid of doing that to his own child.

Definitely he wasn't meant to be a father. He had accepted in a moment of weakness and lust, letting his love for Hermione make the decision for him. Love... He loved her like nothing in this world, she was his life, and he would have done anything she asked him to do.

He was walking slowly towards the room where Hermione was when he saw the Potters waiting outside. That was definitely not a good sign, and he started worrying about his wife. Then he heard it, a scream of pure pain. He ran to the closed room as fast as he could when he recognised her screams. Dear Merlin, if something happened to her, he'd just die. When he was nearing the door, he was stopped by Harry, who stood in front of him to block him.

"Out of my way, Potter! I need to go inside. Something is happening to my Hermione."

"Of course something is happening. She's giving birth, and from what I know, it's painful. We thought it was better to leave her, but you just have to calm down before you enter to join her."

"I won't calm down! You just don't understand a damn thing, you insolent brat! I need to go in there to see her. I need to be sure she's still here with me."

A new scream from inside the room renewed Severus' attempt to pass, but Harry was very strong despite his thin build.

"Let me pass."

"No. It won't help Hermione to see you in this state. I won't allow it."

Severus pressed his wand threateningly against the younger man's chest. He didn't mind cursing him to get him out of the way, and just when he was about to hex him, the door opened to reveal Healer Wilkins. He was smiling broadly, and that lessened Severus' worries.

"Here you are, Severus. Come on. There's someone here who wants to meet you."

Severus passed both men in front of him, only with Hermione in his mind. He didn't feel he cared that much about the baby, only his wife mattered in that moment. When he entered the room, he saw a mediwitch tending Hermione and blocking her from his sight, but when he moved to the side, he saw an image that changed his mind and his heart completely.

Hermione looked tired, but definitely more beautiful than ever, and in her arms, she was holding a tiny bundle wrapped in a blue blanket. When she saw him she smiled broadly, stretching her hand to take his and pull him closer to them.

"Severus, I want you to meet our son. Don't you think he's the most beautiful and perfect baby in the world?"

He couldn't tear his eyes away from the little baby in her arms. He wasn't that pretty by the normal standards; his skin was a deep shade of pink, and he had a little nose that threatened to be just like his. But he was sure he had Hermione's eyes, and for a brief moment, when his son looked at him, Severus could have sworn he also had Hermione's smile. He was theirs, the perfect concoction they'd created, a result from the love they shared with each other. That was enough for him to make him perfect.

"I think Sebastian suits him, wouldn't you agree?"

Severus turned to face Hermione, and an easy smile appeared on his lips.

"Sebastian Snape... I like it." Suddenly sorrow clouded his happiness, the uncertainty about him and the future. "Hermione, what if I never manage to be a good father for him? What if I fail you both?"

"You'll never fail us, Severus. You're not your father. Besides, I'll be by your side all the time. We will do this together, and neither of us will let the other fail. You'll be an excellent father, and I'm so proud to be the mother of your son."

Her words made him feel a way that he had never experienced. Perhaps it was only another facet of the love they shared. Whatever it was made him feel stronger, and he vowed to be the father he had never had, swearing also to be the man Hermione wanted. They were a family now, and nothing else mattered when he held his most precious blessings, Hermione and Sebastian.

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**Lorraine's Notes:** This fic was originally written as a gift for SapphireTragedy in the HGSS Exchange on LJ.

I tried to show Severus' doubts about parenthood without making him hate the idea, and I think you see it here. Poor Hermione, she was feeling so emotional during her pregnancy, and being a first time mother I'm sure she'd look for any available source of information about pregnancy. And she had a hard time because I didn't want her pregnancy to be as smooth and perfect as it's usually described.

I chose the name Sebastian because I think it suits their baby and because it's my nephew's name, and I'm just crazy about him. I battled looking for a title for days, but late the night before sending it I knew I had my title when I heard '*Girl, you'll be a woman soon...*'

Many thanks for lovely beta readers, Southern Witch and CocoaChristy.