

"It's Hermione. She..."

"What? Where is she? Is she alright? Has something happened to my daughter?"

"I'm not very sure, but Keira Flooed saying Hermione wasn't well and that she said something about a potion she needed."

"Don't just stand there, Potter. We need to go to her."

"I can't go. Ginny hasn't been feeling well, and I need to stay by her side. You'll need to go alone."

But Severus didn't answer him. He was already rushing to exit the castle and to get to the Apparition point. Moments later, he was Apparating outside Hermione's house and knocking on her door madly.

The pounding at her door started Hermione, and her first thought was that something was wrong. "Keira, stay here while I go and see what's going on." She reached the door and cast a revealing charm to make sure there wasn't a threat on the other side before opening, but what she found on the other side made her gasp.

"Severus, what are you doing here?"

It was pretty obvious she was perfectly fine, and she looked so beautiful wearing red dress robes that clung perfectly to her body, her hair falling in loose curls over her shoulders. Severus was suddenly speechless, looking at her lovely image, but he recovered quickly.

"Potter said that you had an emergency, that you needed assistance, but it is obvious I was misinformed because you look perfectly fine. I apologise for the intrusion." He was bowing slightly and preparing to leave when a little voice broke the silence.

"Daddy! You came to see us?"

Severus felt himself stiffen again when his daughter hugged him, but this time her mother wasn't looking at him as if she were about to hex him, but it was she again who reacted first.

"Honey, I'm sure your dad wasn't planning to stay here for the night, so I'm not sure that you should ask him that."

"Mummy, I'm sure Daddy was all alone. It's not any fun to be alone at Christmas. Can't he please, please stay with us tonight? Besides, we have plenty of food."

"Keira, I don't think that's a good idea. We don't even know if your father doesn't indeed have other plans or if he would like to stay."

"Daddy, will you stay with us please? I have been a very good girl this year. You can ask Mum. Please stay."

There was something in Keira's pleas that Severus just couldn't resist. "Well, I have not been invited properly, so it would not be appropriate for me to impose my presence here."

"Mum?"

Hermione couldn't resist the look on her daughter's face, and Ginny's words came back to her mind. This was indeed what her daughter wanted this Christmas. Everything that she had done had been for her daughter, so if this was what she wanted so badly, then she would do it.

"Severus, if you don't have any other plans, would you stay with us for dinner? As Keira said, it's not good to be alone on Christmas Eve."

He knew it was now or never. If he ever had a chance to win her back, it would be this night. "Well, considering I have no other appointment for this night, I think I can stay for a while to keep you company."

Keira jumped excitedly and took Severus' hand to guide him inside. "Your hands are cold, Daddy. Come closer to the fire."

Neither Hermione nor Severus could deny that the situation was awkward, but as the minutes passed, the conversation started to flow as it had during the meetings they'd had during the war. Dinner together was very pleasant. Everything Ginny had sent was delicious, and it seemed that all of them wanted to make their first time together as a family something special. After that, they moved to the living room again, and to Hermione's amazement, Severus offered to read Keira a story.

About an hour later, no matter how much she tried to stay awake, Keira's eyes were closing, and she was yawning repeatedly.

"Honey, it's time to go to sleep. Come now. Tell your father goodnight, and let's go."

"Can my Daddy come with us and kiss me goodnight?"

Hermione just turned to Severus in order to weigh his reaction to the girl's petition, and when their eyes met, he just nodded.

"Ok, let's go to your room to change into your pyjamas, and then your dad will go and wish you a good night."

Keira nodded and stood up, kissing Severus on the cheek before following her mother upstairs.

Her small gesture left Severus startled and thinking about what had happened that night. He had felt frustrated with his daughter at times, not knowing how to respond to her affection or how to answer her questions. She was obviously like her mother, eager about knowing everything. Keira would be a very gifted witch for certain. He smiled to himself, analysing the whole evening. He had felt right, as if he really belonged with them and as if he could spend every Christmas Eve like that with them. But not just Christmas: every night as well, every morning, and every day. To be with them always, to wake up with Hermione in his arms, like that morning when he woke up to see her sleeping peacefully with that sated smile on her face. His Hermione...

"Severus! Can you hear me?"

"What? Were you saying something, Hermione?"

Hermione couldn't avoid shivering slightly when she saw the emotions in his eyes when he'd turned to look at her. "I have been calling your name, but you seemed to be so lost in thought."

"Well, you have my attention now."

"Right. Keira is already in bed, and she's just waiting for her father to go and kiss her goodnight."

"Very well. Show me to her room please."

They reached the girl's bedroom and found her already half asleep, only waiting for her father before succumbing to her tiredness. He leaned to kiss her forehead, and his fingers brushed a black curl from her face.

"Goodnight, Keira."

"Goodnight, Daddy. I'm so glad everything worked out and that you came here tonight. I knew that if you remembered that you love each other we'd finally be a family. That was my Christmas wish and the best gift I have received. I love you, Daddy."

Both Hermione and Severus were speechless. So it had been she who had plotted to bring them together. Secretly, they also felt proud of their girl for her cleverness and her cunning. Hermione extinguished the last candle, and both left the room and moved to the sitting room. For several minutes, neither knew what to say, the awkwardness settling back between them. Finally, it was Hermione who broke the silence.

"Thank you for staying here this night. It meant a lot to Keira."

"Just to her?"

"Well, I had a pleasant evening as well. I enjoyed having the conversations back."

"Me too, Hermione. It has been a long time."

"Yeah. Listen, you don't have to go back to Hogwarts this late. I have a spare room, and you can stay there. That is, if you don't mind, of course."

"Do you want me to stay, Hermione?"

"Well, I..."

He had spent so much time being afraid of his feelings, both for Hermione and their daughter, but he didn't feel the fear anymore, just felt a wish to stay with them forever. It was time to take a chance again with her. "Please, look at me when you answer. Look into my eyes and honestly say if you want me to stay."

Hermione looked at him, and she instantly knew he wasn't just talking about this night. He was talking about the future. Merlin, she still loved him so much, but what if he hurt her again or if he hurt Keira? Then, she saw that emotion again in his eyes, the one she saw when she'd interrupted him before, and she knew he wouldn't hurt them.

"I want you to stay, Severus."

He took her hands in his and softly pulled her to him to capture her lips with his. It was like the first kiss they'd shared, but it spoke of a familiarity and of years that had always been there. They kissed and kissed again, lost in the chance they had to find each other. Tomorrow they would talk about what would happen after this evening, but for tonight, they just knew they wanted to stay like this forever.

Author's Notes: I chose the name Keira for their daughter because of its meaning: dark.

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