

# Happy Birthday

*by averygoodun*

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## one

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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*Thanks go to Southern for betaing this fluffernutter.*

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It had been a mistake. Both of them knew it at the time, but they went ahead and slept together anyway.

For Hermione, it was a way to escape reality for just a few splendid moments. Her relationship with Hassan had been heading south for some time, but she wasn't eager to confront the end. Hassan was a wonderful man, who had been the perfect partner as an Auror all those years ago, and he should have been a perfect life partner for her. But in the end, he wasn't quite right.

She wouldn't have slept with Severus if he were.

For Severus, it was also an escape from reality for a few splendid moments, although it was more living a fantasy than just escaping the mind-numbing drudgery of day-to-day life. He'd dreamed of screwing over the Chosen One for more years than he'd care to remember and to get the chance to actually do so, even if it was in an indirect fashion, was too good an opportunity to pass up.

So, when Professor Granger had flirted with him, he'd decided to flirt back. He knew it was flirting with danger, but at that point he felt he could deal with it. He just hadn't realized that the danger he was flirting with wasn't a green-eyed, over-protective friend, but something much, much more insidious.

Hassan hadn't been pleased when Hermione told him of her affair, but he hadn't been terribly surprised either. He and Hermione had been able to read each other since their days as Aurors, and he had seen the discontent of his lover for some time. If he were honest with himself, he'd felt more than a little discontented as well.

It wasn't that he didn't love his witch, because he did. And he knew that she loved him as well. It was more that he knew that he was holding back something of his heart, and he felt that if they were really right for each other, he wouldn't hold back anything.

So, he accepted the loss of the woman he loved with more equanimity than he felt was appropriate, and they parted somberly after one last, lingering night together.

Two months later, Hermione found herself in a bit of a pickle. She had been feeling a little off for some time, but nothing very serious. She'd just found her blood sugar level was a little more sensitive than usual. If she forgot to eat, she'd crash and feel wretched, even throwing up a few times from it.

It wasn't until she realized she'd missed two periods that she knew the problem was a bit more serious than just having to make sure food was on hand at all times.

It was unfortunate that Ron wasn't around at that moment because if he had been, he would have had the chance to be the one to chastise ~~her~~ for foul language, although,

knowing Ron, he would have been too flabbergasted by Hermione knowing such words let alone being able to utter them to say anything in response.

Of course, Hermione wasn't thinking about Ron when she turned the air blue. She was thinking of two tall, dark-haired, hooked-nosed men, and how she was going to tell them that she was pregnant but didn't know whose child it was.

Hassan's first reaction was borne from his inner traditionalist. He immediately demanded she marry him. Thinking about it weeks, months and years afterward, he realized that he was lucky to still be alive.

As it was, Hermione was not impressed. Looking back on that interview, he rather thought that if he hadn't demanded, but asked, she might have agreed. But he had demanded, and he was convinced that the only thing that saved him from an untimely and painful death was his mother walking in on them at that moment and slapping him upside the head and yelling at him for being so insensitive and brutish.

He often wondered if it had been Providence or maternal instinct, but it seemed that reaming was all that was needed to soothe Hermione's insulted pride. She left with a dozen of his mother's best latkes bundled up in her purse and a promise to his mother to Floo if she needed anything from advice to booties.

He knew that even if the child weren't his, his mother would dote on it like a true grandchild. Sometimes he thought she liked Hermione better than she did him. He wondered if that was one of the reasons he and Hermione hadn't worked out as a couple.

Severus' reaction to the news was denial. When she'd given him the out of it possibly being her previous lover's child and not his, he told her that he would deny any and all responsibility for the child. He did not want any children. Ever. The very thought made him slightly ill.

He was certain that it couldn't possibly be his. He didn't really remember performing any contraceptive charms, but that didn't mean he hadn't. Or that she hadn't. He refused to believe that two intelligent adults whose minds were not addled by potions or alcohol would be so foolish as to have completely unprotected sex. Not when the two intelligent people included himself and Hermione.

It was inconceivable.

Hermione took the reactions of her two ex-lovers with surprising aplomb. She wasn't actually sorry to be pregnant, although it would make life a bit more difficult for her. She knew that if it were Hassan's, he would provide support both financially and emotionally if she requested it of him, even if she didn't marry him.

And she really didn't want to marry him. Now that she was out of the relationship, she couldn't imagine going back. She still loved him, and if she was honest with herself, she hoped it was his child just for the future child's temperament's sake, but when she tried to imagine living with him for the rest of her life, she had an imagination failure.

Sure, she could imagine morning tea and evening talks in cozy armchairs with Hassan; they'd already lived that. She could even imagine him changing nappies and comforting her when she went absolutely bonkers with exhaustion, forcing her to go to bed with a nice cup of chamomile while he took care of the baby. He was that sort of a person. But that was where her imagination ended.

She couldn't imagine living with him day in and day out with no escape. She couldn't imagine being satisfied with his being the first and last face she saw every day. She couldn't imagine them being any happier with each other years down the line than they were when they'd broken up.

He was a good person and would be a good father even if the child wasn't his, but she didn't think it would be in anyone's best interest for them to get married. Not even for the child.

Hassan also came to this conclusion after a while. He asked her to marry him again actually asking this time but found himself relieved that she wouldn't.

He half hoped that it was his child she was carrying, but he knew that marrying her for the child's sake would make for a difficult union. He just didn't love her in that way any longer, although he told Hermione that he would support her no matter what.

Severus, meanwhile, avoided Hermione.

Hermione was relieved that she wouldn't start showing until the very end of the school year. As it was, a lot of students had noticed her increased exhaustion. When she announced she wouldn't be coming back the next year, the rumor spread the gamut from her having been cursed, and she was dying a slow, debilitating death, to her being pregnant with Professor Snape's lovechild.

She, personally, was vastly amused that most students dismissed the lovechild theories as too unrealistic to be true. Judging by Severus' sour looks, he wasn't as amused by how close the students had come to the truth of the matter.

In truth, Severus *wasn't* amused. He couldn't care less what the students were saying about him or Professor Granger, or even what the staff was whispering. No, he was upset because, try as he might, it was damn near impossible to ignore Hermione now.

He still avoided her, but he found that, in spite of his best efforts, whenever she walked in the room, his eyes would follow her. She attracted his attention like no other, and he was at a loss as to why.

Yes, he found her attractive. No matter his motives behind sleeping with her, he wouldn't have done so if he'd found her repulsive. He'd considered that attraction to be a very nice bonus. But, for some reason, he found her even more attractive now.

He also found himself feeling protective of her, which was utterly ridiculous. There was so little chance of it being his child growing in her womb that it was silly to want to chivvy her into a chair when she shifted her weight, or tell her to go to bed when she looked tired, or ask her if she was eating enough.

It was ludicrous. He had no intention of changing his and Hermione's relationship into something more than just colleagues. He had no intention of changing his mind about his role in her child's life. But, for some reason, he couldn't stop watching her or sending elves to her quarters to make sure she could relax and sleep well as befitted her condition.

And, most embarrassingly, he couldn't keep his eyes off of her belly, wondering when those loose robes of hers would finally reveal the bulge of life she carried.

Hermione wasn't aware of Severus' scrutiny for the first month or two. But by the third month, she was very aware of his covert glances. She'd noticed his eyes immediately seeking her out when he entered a room. She'd noticed he'd scowl at her when she knew she looked dead on her feet. He never made a move to help her, but she sometimes thought she saw him twitch, as if the urge was there.

It amused her in a sad sort of way.

She, of course, wouldn't have noticed these small tells if she hadn't been watching Severus in her turn. She found that she couldn't keep herself from thinking about him. Their night together had been very nice, but it hadn't been something that she'd thought would stay in her memory for all time. It hadn't been *that* good.

But it did keep coming back to her. Persistently. At first, this annoyed her. Why should her night with Severus have precedence over all her nights with Hassan? Why should he, with his one night, displace the years she'd had with someone who actually cared for her?

Unfortunately, she was an honest sort of person and quickly came to the answer she didn't want to face: she fancied Severus. She'd fancied him since before she'd started seeing Hassan. She'd fallen for Hassan in part because he looked a bit like Severus.

Despite calling herself all kinds of crazy for this revelation, she couldn't ignore it. At first it made her miserable, thinking that she was such a hopeless twit as to fall for

someone who would never feel anything for her except for maybe a bit of lust now and again. But, as she started watching Severus, and noticed how he watched her, the misery soon faded into that horrible thing called hope.

Normally she wouldn't call hope bad names, but after a few months had gone by with Severus still watching her but also avoiding her like the plague, it began to be a bit disheartening. In that time she had allowed herself to daydream about him, to imagine life with him and their child. She'd allowed herself to revel in her misguided feelings for the man instead of brutally suppressing them as she'd done before. And the unfortunate thing about feelings is that once they are released, they're absolute hell to stuff back in the box. They refuse to go. They protest by getting stronger and more vocal until it's almost painful to be with them day and night as they constantly force themselves into the forefront of the mind, displacing all other thoughts.

But Hermione wasn't a brooder by nature, so eventually she came to accept her feelings, and in return, they mellowed out, allowing her to concentrate on things other than one Severus Snape, which was probably a good thing, as it was well past time to start thinking of her child and what the hell she was going to do about raising it.

She had to have a proper place to live, for one. Her tiny flat in London wouldn't work for long, although it might work for the first year. Without her job at Hogwarts, she'd have to figure out how to support herself and the baby. Although with Hassan's mother, Jazzy, there as a willing (more than willing, really) babysitter, she figured she'd be able to scrounge up something.

But the biggest and scariest thing was that she'd have to figure out how to take care of the baby. She was an only child. She'd never been big on kids, and her babysitting years had been taken up by battling Voldemort, not practicing parenthood.

She had no clue what to do.

She was pretty sure Momma Jazzy would be more than happy to help her out and teach her the basics, but the help would only last so long, and as Hermione had gathered, children were constantly changing and evolving. She was deathly afraid that she wouldn't be able to keep up.

But Hermione was nothing if not a researcher. She looked at every book about parenting in the library (and was mildly surprised at the school's selection). When she'd gone through those, she owed Mrs. Weasley for her recommendations. Then Ginny. Then Jazzy.

The most unfortunate thing was the conflicting advice that came with the recommendations. Mrs. Weasley, for example, loved Healer Meritus' book, "Babies are Babies the World Around," while Ginny and Momma Jazzy both considered it utter tripe. Ginny liked Janet Amicus' encyclopedic "Baby A to Baby Z" while Molly dismissed it as ineffectual mumblings on a subject the author knew nothing about. Momma Jazzy insisted that books weren't the answer, and she needed to find a family to infiltrate and observe, preferably with hands on practice.

Unfortunately, the only family Hermione knew who had actual babies in the house was Draco's, and she doubted very much that he and his wife would be willing to let her in to observe them.

So, Hermione fretted. She planned and read and sorted everything out into tidy little compartments in her mind, but she fretted that it wouldn't be enough. She was missing the hands-on knowledge, and she was certain that, like Defense Against the Dark Arts, it was impossible to be effective with only the theory and no practical.

As they neared the end of the school year, Severus noticed Hermione's anxiety level go up. At first he thought it was just her normal preparing-for-exams nerves because she suffered them every year, even though she was now the one writing and grading them rather than taking them. It was one of her many, many quirks.

But not being able to take his eyes off of her, he eventually noticed that she looked uncomfortable. He remembered, with a bit of quick mental arithmetic, that it was getting near her due date. Watching her squirm uncomfortably in her chair, he was overcome with horror that she was now in labor.

Watching her for a few tense seconds longer, he calmed down, as she didn't look physically distressed as much as mentally distressed. He had almost managed to dismiss it again as exam nerves by the time Minerva left the staff room, leaving him and Hermione alone, so he was startled and shocked when she promptly burst into tears.

He had never seen her cry, and certainly not with such abandon, before, so he was momentarily stunned. Thinking about it later, he realized he must have looked like a guppy to Hermione, staring at her with such a befuddled expression on his face. Although he tried, he couldn't come up with another reason why she switched from sobs to laughs so quickly.

When she started laughing, something of the shock wore off, and he moved to Hermione's side. He didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything. It seemed, though, that just moving closer was a signal that he was willing to comfort her, as she rolled herself upright and threw her arms around him, sobbing into his chest.

He didn't know what to do. A part of him, the grumpy part, cringed at the thought of her wet nose and eyes on his robes. Another part, probably the part that had slept with her for revenge on Potter, was pleased at her distress. It served her right for being so careless, after all. But he was surprised that the largest part of him wrapped his arms around her and started humming soothing noises, as that largest part wanted nothing more than to hold and comfort this witch of his.

Of course, the fact that she wasn't his witch in any sense of the word didn't matter at that moment. At that moment he could happily pretend that she was, and so he did. He continued holding and rocking her until she gasped and moaned, pulling away with a look of regret on her face.

He was offended for a single moment until she explained that her water had broken, and she thought going to the infirmary might be prudent at that point in time. He wholeheartedly agreed.

He escorted her there and then promptly disappeared, his fear of everything Hermione related chasing him from her bedside. The fear that hurt him the most in his retreat was that it most likely *wasn't* his child she was about to bear. There was no reason she would want to be with him anymore.

He had missed his chance.

Labor was a very different experience from what Hermione had been expecting. Yes, it had hurt **a lot**, but at the same time, the part she thought would hurt the most, the pushing the grapefruit-sized object through the peach-sized hole, was actually more of a relief than a pain. It almost felt *good* bearing down.

Almost.

With Poppy's help, she welcomed little Harriet Granger, six pounds twelve ounces, into the world with an exhausted smile. And then she fell into the deep sleep of recovery.

Severus paced in his room, hating that he was so nervous and anxious and, most of all, scared. He knew he should probably be alerting people that Hermione would be indisposed for the remainder of the term due to her early labor, but he found himself reluctant to share the news.

What if it was his child? By all accounts, babies looked like their fathers. What would Minerva do to him when she looked at the child and then looked at him? Especially since he would be the one bearing the news, which was unusual in the extreme, considering his avoidance of Hermione.

But the thought that kept kicking his brain until he acknowledged it was, what if the child was his? He couldn't exactly crow about it, handing out cigars and expecting congratulatory pats on the back like normal fathers did. Like he wanted.

His stomach flipped. He didn't want to be the father, did he? Surely he didn't. The mere thought of changing nappies made his already pale skin lighten a shade further.

He decided the best course would be to have a firewhiskey. Once the child was born, the paternity test was easily and simply done. He was certain that if he was revealed to be the father, he'd hear about it soon enough. From many, many sources. And for quite a while.

Hassan got the news of Hermione giving birth just as he was about to propose to his girlfriend. His proposal wasn't quite what he'd rehearsed, but he was thrilled all the same when she agreed to go with him to Hogwarts to see his ex-girlfriend's daughter, which was possibly his. He took that as a 'yes' anyway.

Hermione was rather upset when she woke up to find out that Severus hadn't stopped by to see how she was. As per Hermione's pre-labor instructions, Poppy had owed Hassan as soon as Harriet had been born, and Poppy told her that he was on his way.

But Poppy didn't know about Severus. No one did. Just as he wanted.

She told herself she was being silly expecting him to change his mind about avoiding her just because he'd done the decent thing by comforting her and then escorting her to the infirmary. She was silly if she expected him to change his mind about being part of her or her child's life. He'd made himself abundantly clear on that issue.

But, finding that he hadn't even told anyone else on the staff, not even Minerva, that she was in labor... that he cared that little about her... She told herself she was being silly, but it didn't help her feel any better.

She was just about to start sniffling when Poppy came into view holding what was unmistakably a bundle of swaddling at which she was cooing.

Hermione smiled wryly at the sight of permanently frowning Poppy smiling and making googly eyes at something that couldn't even smile yet. However, when the bundle was placed in her arms, and she set eyes on her daughter, the smile was no longer wry. She did tear up a little, but it was only because her heart had grown so much in that instant that something had to give under the pressure, and the tear ducts were already primed.

Little Harriet was the most beautiful, ugly thing she had ever laid eyes on. Her scrunched up, squished face on her misshapen head was so utterly perfect and dear to her heart that Hermione forgot she didn't know how to be a mother and became one.

After twelve hours of not hearing anything, good or bad, Severus couldn't take the tension anymore. He had to see how Hermione was doing. He had to see if she was okay. He had to see if the child was okay. He had to see if the child was his.

Unsure whether he was hoping to find a ginger-haired, blue-eyed baby or one closer to his coloring, he made his way up to the infirmary. Upon reaching the corridor, however, he paused at hearing quite a few voices.

He rounded the last corner to find a crowd of students loitering nervously near the infirmary door. When he made his presence known in his normal, intimidating fashion, he was shocked that the students didn't look upset to see him there, but rather pleased.

Before he could even ask what was going on, they ambushed him with questions about Professor Granger, wondering if it was true she had collapsed and was on the point of death, or if it was true that she had been cursed by an evil wizard, and had been screaming in agony as Madam Pomfrey tried in vain to find the counter-curse.

One brazen Gryffindor even asked if it wasn't true that she was, in fact, in labor with his child. He rather lost his temper at that and shooed them away with the threat of massive point losses and detentions for loitering and gossip mongering.

But the fact was that he was disturbed. Hermione had been screaming? He knew that women in labor tended to scream, but to know that *his* Hermione had been screaming left him cold and dizzy.

What if the students were right and she was in there dying? What if Poppy couldn't stop the bleeding that was sure to happen after such a traumatic event?

He put his hand on the door handle, and almost opened it, but then realized what it would look like if he rushed in there. He would look more than just pathetic; he'd look foolish.

But...

He was dithering about what to do when he heard some voices coming in his direction. Not wanting to be caught hanging around the door of the infirmary, he quickly Disillusioned himself. Just as the spell took complete effect, a couple of strangers came into view. The man was tallish, thin and had a nose to rival his while the woman was short, petite and looked vaguely familiar.

He wondered at the appearance of the visitors until he heard the woman point to the door and tell the man that it was the infirmary and did he want to see Hermione and the baby alone because she could wait outside.

A fierce wave of jealousy swept over Severus as he recognized the man as his nameless rival. Of course Hermione would let the other father candidate know, but not him. He tried to ignore the fact that he knew first from being with her when she'd gone into labor, but it was too obvious. It didn't help his mood or his outlook on the stranger, though.

What did help Severus' outlook on the stranger was when the man took the woman's hand in his, brought it up to his mouth and kissed it. Not only was it a move that only a man who was romantically involved with the woman would make but it also highlighted the rather large engagement ring the lady had on her finger.

When the man told his fiancée that he would prefer she came along, and that Hermione would like to meet her, Severus almost felt kindly toward him. Almost.

When the couple opened the door, Severus was poised and darted in just after them.

He didn't know what to expect, but he was pretty sure it wasn't the sight that met his eyes. Hermione lying propped up in her bed, looking down at the bundle in her arms, while the light from the window above her shone down on her, lighting her wild mane of hair like a corona. It made her look very much like a religious icon.

He hadn't expected the cliché. He also hadn't expected her to look up and smile at him. Her smile was so dazzling that it took a moment to realize that it wasn't him she was smiling at, but the stranger's woman who was hanging back.

It shouldn't have been surprising to him that the let-down was painful, but it was.

Hassan approached Hermione's bed slowly. He wasn't sure what he was feeling, although nervousness certainly was a big part of it. He didn't know whether he wanted this to be his daughter or not. He had a new life with Mary all planned out, and although she seemed okay with this complication, he didn't know how she would feel about this a year or five down the line. Adding their own kids to the mix would make this even more complicated.

And then, if it was his, what about custody? He didn't want to take the child away from Hermione, but would Mary want to? Would she want to raise his daughter as her own?

And was he ready to be a father? He realized it didn't matter whether he was or not. If this was his child, it was his child, and he would have to be a father, but... was he ready? Would he be a good father?

And what if he fell in love with the child only to find out it wasn't his? He didn't *think* Hermione would keep him from the child, but it was a possibility.

So, it was definitely with anxiety that Hassan approached Hermione and the baby. However, his fears melted away when he saw Hermione look up and smile first at him, but then over his shoulder at Mary. It reminded him of just what sort of person Hermione was and that he had nothing to worry about where she was concerned.

He felt Mary tentatively approach his side, and he introduced the two women. Any fears he might have had over them not getting along vanished as Mary oohed and aahed over the baby girl, thus instantly ingratiating herself to Hermione's maternal pride. Hermione responded by bestowing upon Mary the honor of holding her baby girl.

Hermione liked Mary the instant she saw her. It was one of those instant connections that are rare but true. As she gave her precious daughter to Mary to hold, she observed Mary and Hassan together and was struck by how right they were for each other. Mary was cooing at Harriet while Hassan looked on and unconsciously wrapped his arm around Mary, making them a unit of strength and love.

That was how it was supposed to be and never was for her and Hassan. That was what she was looking for in a partner, that unity and strength formed from love. Her mind wondered whether she would ever find that special bond while her heart betrayed her and imagined Severus and herself in place of Hassan and Mary. It was a comforting image, even if it was a lie.

She sighed and wondered what Severus would think of the scene.

Severus suppressed a sigh as he watched the stranger and his woman ogle the child. It was such a domestic scene, and it should have inspired disgust and three thousand sharp comments, but his mind seemed muddled by emotion. He was so overcome by jealousy and envy and want that the only thing he could think of was that he wished it was him, Hermione and the baby standing there making the ridiculously idyllic image.

He leaned forward to rest his elbows on Hermione's bed, and in his inattention, he brushed against Hermione's shoulder. He pulled back immediately and stayed as still as possible when she glanced his way, but her attention seemed to be still focused on her child and the people holding it.

He breathed a very quiet sigh of relief, but before he could relax properly, the stranger asked Hermione the question that had been plaguing Severus' mind for the last six and a half months: did she know whose child it was?

He waited on bated breath for the answer.

Hermione resisted the urge to look over her shoulder at the Disillusioned man behind her. If he wanted to remain hidden, she would let him. The happiness in her heart at finding out that he really did care wasn't enough to let him get away with finding out that he was the father in such a sneaky fashion.

Lying had never been Hermione's strong suit, but she didn't know how to fool Severus without doing so. After mentally waffling for a couple of moments, trying to decide what to do, she finally answered with a question of her own. She asked Hassan what he wanted the answer to be.

Severus ground his teeth.

Hassan looked at the little girl in his fiancée's arms and then at Mary's face. He wanted the girl in Mary's arms to be his, but he had a feeling she wasn't. He looked back at Hermione and noticed her eyes flick to the side. His gaze casually followed hers, and he saw the faint outline of a person right behind her.

His eyes meandered around the room for a second or two before returning to Hermione's. With her look of permission, he slipped into her mind and saw her taking the test a few minutes before he had arrived. He felt his heart sink just a little at what he learned, but he decided it was probably for the best this way. He didn't know if she knew that she'd broadcast her feelings for the other man, but he could feel her elation and confusion and fear at the results. Even though he was disappointed, he took pity on her and played along.

He slipped back out of her mind, mentally thanking her as he left, and then shrugged his shoulders, telling her out loud that he didn't know, that it was all very confusing and complicated and difficult to say. He told everyone he'd like a little more time to think about it.

Mary looked a bit surprised, but Hermione nodded with a small, sly smile. Hassan pitied the poor man behind her.

Severus, meanwhile, continued grinding his teeth.

It seemed to take the strangers an inordinate amount of time to leave, but eventually they did, leaving only himself, Hermione and the tiny, little girl. He was so wrapped up in watching the child snoozing in her mother's arms that he didn't notice that Hermione wasn't looking at the baby any more. When he glanced up to peek at her, she was looking directly at him.

The war had been long enough before that a few of his finely honed instincts had grown a bit flabby, so he recoiled before he remembered that he was Disillusioned. However, he knew that once he moved, the game was up, especially as she'd been looking right at him. Considering her expression didn't change except for a slight quirk to her lips, he knew she'd been aware that he'd been there for quite some time.

Dropping the Disillusionment Spell, he looked back at her defiantly. They did nothing but stare at each other for more than a minute before Severus realized Hermione was not going to back down. He gave in by looking down at the baby.

Hermione was rather pleased that when he conceded, Severus looked at Harriet. He could have looked out the window or at his feet or anywhere, but he chose to acknowledge the baby. She tried not to look on it symbolically and interpret it as him acknowledging Harriet as possibly his own, but considering the soft look he was giving the child, she was hard pressed not to.

After a few seconds of silence, she was surprised when he bluntly asked who the father was. She was even more surprised by the note of longing and defeat in his voice, as if he knew the answer, and it wasn't him. As if he had finally admitted that he wanted a life he would be denied after all.

She had planned to tease him in retribution for the hope she had suffered, but she found she didn't have the heart for it. Instead, she asked him the same question she had asked Hassan.

Severus hesitated, but only for a moment. He could tell from Hermione's tone, her suddenly tense posture, her soft, brown eyes, that he was being given the chance he thought had gone. His heart swelled, even as his head ached for trying to come up with the best words to use.

In the end, he tried to answer all her unspoken questions, telling her that he wanted to be in her life however he could.

This time when she started laughing and sobbing at the same time, he hoped that it had nothing to do with his facial expression and everything to do with her heart. He felt that way as well. Even if he wasn't going to show it.

Harriet Snape never knew that her daddy used to be the bane of Hogwarts' students. Not that she would have believed it had anyone dared to tell her.

To her, he was Daddy, and that was that.

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AN: *Happy Birthday, Ginny!*