

Fulfilling A Yearning

by zyra

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How is Severus going to find out?

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thank you to my beta, notplainjane, for the huge assistance in correcting my mistakes. I'm hopeless without you! Thank you also to i_shah2079 for reading it first. You're the best mate anyone could wish for!

Something is wrong. He could sense it.

One, she wouldn't meet his eyes when she got out of the Floo. Under normal circumstances, he would be the first thing she would look for when she emerged from the fireplace. But today, she was determinedly avoiding his eyes.

Two, she brushed the soot from her sleeve for two long minutes. Methodically, too. Her robes were more flawless than any house-elf could proudly claim they had the 'honour' to make them.

She tried her best to look natural. Other people might not be able to distinguish it. But, oh, he wasn't any 'other people.' He was her husband. And he hadn't spent a good twenty years as a spy and five years married to her not to sense, let alone notice, that something was bothering her. Usually, when she came home from work, tired as she was, she would at least walk over to him and ask how his day had been. And she would gauge his mood from his response.

Being married to him was not easy. He had told her that, and she had insisted that she had walked into this union with her eyes wide open. He was a quiet and guarded man. He wouldn't easily let his emotions be known. Every twitch and crease on his face meant something. She had to look closely and catch them quickly before they passed over his face and it became a closely guarded mask again. The war had long been over, but old habits died hard.

She was getting better at guessing how he felt, too, as the time passed. She had told him about it. She found it easier to ask him first and watch his response before jumping to the wrong conclusion when he met her with a stern face each evening. Merlin, she even had *names* for them too. His responses.

They were spending their time lazily reading by the fireplace one Sunday evening, with her lying on his lap, when he asked why she never failed to ask him how his day had gone when she first got back from work.

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"Oh, is it that obvious?" she asked looking up at him.

"Not obvious, per se. But I've slowly come to... expect it... from you when you walk in from the Floo. Is there any other reason, beside the clear objective of your question,

for inquiring how my day had gone?" he asked.

"Well... I would tell you, but there would go my secret."

"What secret?"

"Oh, come off it, Severus. It's not like I'm keeping anything from you. It's just my method of guessing at your mood. That's all."

"My mood. Elaborate."

"Well..." she began slowly. It was written all over her face that she was carefully stringing together each word, afraid that they might come out wrong.

"Tell me. I'm absolutely ecstatic to learn more," he drawled in a low tone, his eyes bright with amusement.

She snorted. If it weren't for his eyes, she would have still hesitated.

"Well..." she said before licking her lips, causing his eyes to darken with her unintentional tease. "When I get back from work," she started, oblivious to his sudden interest in her lips, "I want to know how you're feeling at that moment before I jump into telling you about my day. I'd rather have a lively conversation that goes both ways. I mean, when I get home, tired as I am, I can't wait to share whatever findings I made in my research and have a decent conversation with someone who knows what he's saying and won't ridicule me. But I wouldn't get the response I wanted if you were in one of your moods, would I?"

He raised his eyebrow, but didn't say anything, so she continued.

"So, in order to make sure you're not in one of your moods, I find it easier to ask a general question and decide from your response, or lack thereof," she finished.

"And?"

"And, I find that I can categorize your emotions at three different levels. The first is the 'Do-Not-Talk-to-Me-Or-I-Swear-I-Will-Deduct-So-Many-Points-From-Gryffindor-They-Will-Not-Recover-Quickly-Enough-To-Win-the-House-Cup-Next-Year'."

He mentally winced. He knew those moments. They were rare, but he could have sworn that that was the very thing he'd been thinking when she'd asked him how he'd been. He vaguely wondered if she'd suddenly been gifted with the ability to read minds. He thought not.

"And how do I respond that has me positioned in that category?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing," she affirmed. "Well, except for grunting, which sometimes comes close to growling, you ignore me and won't even look up from what you're doing at the moment."

He winced physically at that.

"Hermione," he started, but he was cut short by her finger on his lips.

"Don't. You don't have to apologize. I'm not angry at you. Merlin, you asked me to tell you. Have you ever seen me angry when you're in that kind of mood?"

"No."

And that was the truth. In fact, now that he thought about it, he vaguely remembered how Hermione would react to this feedback. He would hear her walk over to their armchair, after picking a book from the bookcase by the wall, and sit down to read. Sometimes she would doze off, depending on how tired she was. He would finish whatever it was he was doing and look at her sleeping form in their armchair. There was only one armchair in front of the fireplace where he sat most of the time, journal in hand. Sometimes, later, Hermione would join him on his lap ("My territory!" she would growl possessively), and they would cuddle by the warmth of the fire, journal forgotten on the floor; thus the nickname 'their armchair'. Of course, there was also a long couch beside the wall, the sole purpose of which was to let him sit at one end with Hermione laying her head down on his lap, but they both seemed to prefer the chair. When he looked at her in their armchair, he would be struck by how fragile and peaceful she looked. He would feel a strong urge to protect her. And slowly, his tension would melt away, overcome by that feeling. How easily she did that to him, just by sleeping.

"You said there are three levels. What is level two?"

"Level two is the 'Thank-God-You're-Here-I'm-Going-To-Explode-In-Thirty-Seconds' feeling."

He looked at her incredulously.

"My response?"

"Oh, you look up this time. But you also pinch the bridge of your nose and frown, so I know you have one of your headaches."

"Ah."

He knew these moments very well; he was almost always in this kind of mood. Her response had surprised him the first time, but he'd welcomed it each time afterward. She would reach beside him and gather him close in her embrace. And she would kiss his temple. Exactly at the point where his headache throbbed the worst. He had stiffened when she did it the first time and tried to pull away until she said, "Shh... it's not pity. Everybody needs comfort sometime or another, and that's all I'm offering here."

It did feel nice. Very nice and comfortable indeed. And he would surrender into her embrace and hold her close to him. "Better?" she would ask. Miraculously, he did feel better.

He was a Potions master, and he could come up with quite a number of headache potions to ease the pain. But even the most effective failed to top 'Hermione's remedy,' as he fondly called it. But he was not going to share her with anyone. No. Not ever. Other people could down the thick, acrid, bitter, muddy-coloured Ache-Easing Potion for all he cared.

She was his.

End of discussion.

Period.

He didn't have many things, or people, he treasured, and so it was only understandable that he felt so bloody possessive of her.

"And what, pray tell, is the third level?"

"The third level? Well... it's the... erm..."

He could sense her discomfort. He wondered if the third level could be 'it'. Those moments were rare, not in terms of occurrence, no, but in terms of the urgency to satisfy when he saw her after a whole day of hell at work.

"Well, it's the erm..."

"Yes..." he drawled.

"It's the 'Come-Here-Or-Else' mood."

He waited for more.

"That's it? Only four words?"

"Well, there's more, but I'm not going to tell you. As it is, I've spilled more than I intended to. So, yeah, you only get four words with this one."

He stroked her arm languidly before moving to her stomach and rubbed small circles just below her breasts.

"Oh, that's nice... Wait," she said, stilling his hand, "don't think you can coax me into telling you more, Severus. That's not fair."

"But I am, my dear, first and foremost a Slytherin who would do anything, anything, to acquire what I desire," he said silkily and smirked. She shivered. He knew she liked it when he showed his Slytherin side. It was all that 'dark and brooding' nonsense. But he decided not to torture her more, at least not yet.

"You haven't told me the kind of response I give that goes into that category."

"Well, you look up and raise your eyebrow and hold out your hand."

"And?"

"And I go over to you."

"And?"

"And I sit on your lap 'cause, you know, it looks so comfy and all," she shrugged before continuing, "and we kiss."

"And?"

"And... oh, stop it, Severus! You know what happens after that!"

"I do, but I have a sudden need to hear it from your delicious lips," he drawled, "before I turn your brain to mush and all I hear are some indecipherable sounds."

She enlightened him. Albeit with much difficulty. True to his words, when he shifted and positioned her on top of his lap, leaving her at his mercy, her brain did turn to mush after several minutes of kissing. Let it never be said that he, Severus Snape, did not know what to do to distract his brilliant, non-stop-talking, know-it-all, young wife. He enacted, one by one, the very acts that his wife told him would happen after those rare episodes. Before long, she was shuddering under him, and he knew that dinner in the Great Hall was quickly forgotten.

After she'd spilled this 'secret' confession, he'd thought that it wouldn't do if his emotions could be so easily 'categorized'...heaven forbid. At times, when he was feeling inspired, he would vary his responses and watch Hermione stand there, deciding how to react. He had to admit, if only to himself, that it was entertaining to watch her, her eyes scouring his face for any hints that would give him away. He would mix, say, level one with level three, growling while extending his hand, and wait for her to decide whether to go to him or not. Inwardly, he would be chuckling.

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He didn't feel like chuckling now. He wondered, yet again, what had caused her current behaviour.

*His day had started as ordinarily as it could have. Only one cauldron melted in his second-year Potions class. Luckily, it happened before the current assignment's second stage, in which the roots of *lepidium peruvianum* were added, had begun. That ingredient was quite tedious to acquire because he could only gather it during a one-day downpour of rain, when the roots could be easily pulled whole from the wet soil and thus restored to its fresh form. If the potion had got to the second stage, he would have been even more furious with the miserable, cauldron-melting student. But he was not going to use that as an excuse for not deducting points from said student. *Where would be the fun in that?* Thirty points sufficed, and he felt instantly better when he'd taken them.*

When the day ended, he'd sat at his desk, marking essays while waiting for Hermione to return home. He'd heard the rushing sound indicating that someone was coming through the fireplace. No one could Floo into their quarters from outside Hogwarts' grounds. They had, however, asked the Headmistress to provide a general Floo connection just inside the main entrance that could go anywhere in the castle. In Severus and Hermione's case, the in-coming Flooer would need to know their specific password, which he changed every day. (No, he wasn't just being paranoid; his quarters were the only place where he could unwind, so it wouldn't do if just anyone could enter at will.) At least it saved Hermione the walk down to the dungeons.

Earlier, he'd heard her stepping through, and so he'd waited eagerly for her daily inquiry. He couldn't wait to extend his hand, indicating that he was in one of 'those' moods. But the inquiry never came.

That's odd.

He'd lifted his head slowly and watched her still brushing the non-existent soot off her robes. As though she suddenly realized that she had been brushing far too long, but still not looking at him, she'd walked over to the bookcase by the wall and stood still with her back to him.

That had made him raise his eyebrow.

Now, he wondered if it was her time of the month. That couldn't be; she'd had her monthly menses two week ago. And furthermore, in the five years of their marriage, there'd been several occasions during "that time of the month" that left her looking tired and tense. But not once would she...intentionally or not...refuse to look him in the eyes.

He got up from his chair, and it skid back with a screeching sound. He saw her shoulders stiffen.

That certainly piqued his curiosity.

They hadn't been fighting. In fact, she'd been cheerful when she'd left for work that morning.

He walked over to her.

He was determined to find out what was bothering her. He had to work this carefully if he expected her to open up and tell him. Other, lesser men would simply demand an explanation, but he wouldn't be a true Slytherin if he couldn't talk her into opening up. Besides, he loved his wife. Demanding an explanation would only make her feel worse. And that method would never produce an accurate answer, anyway. Should he bother?

Maybe he should test it first.

"Hermione." It wasn't a question.

It took her several seconds before she answered, "Yes."

She was still talking to him. Maybe this wasn't as serious as he had thought.

He edged closer, put his hand on her back, and rubbed slowly in small circles. He could feel her stiffen again.

"Are you alright, Hermione?"

"I... I'm fine. Yes."

"You do not sound fine to me. Do you wish to tell me what's wrong?"

"Erm, it's nothing. I'm fine, really."

All the while, she refused to turn and look at him.

Fine, indeed.

"Come," he said, pulling her right hand firmly, but not forcefully, and walked her over to their armchair. He sat and tugged her gently onto his lap. She hesitated at first, but gave in, and Severus pulled her close and wrapped his robes around her.

"Your hands are cold. And, your shoulders are stiff. What is it?"

She shook her head and remained tense. But the warmth must have been comforting, for within minutes, she snuggled closer to him and wrapped her arms around his waist, sighing deeply. He waited for her to speak. He didn't want to suggest any reasons for her behaviour, or she wouldn't open up at all, thinking that her reason was not worth his time. He couldn't have that. And so he waited.

However, he was not idle; he caught her right hand in his and rubbed it, restoring its warmth. His hands continued their ministrations to her left hand, and she sighed more deeply and closed her eyes.

"Thank you. That feels very nice," she murmured into his shoulder.

"You're most welcome. Now, are you going to tell me why the sudden coldness toward me?"

"Coldness? Toward you?" She opened her eyes. "No. Is that what it looked like? No, I could never be cold toward you, Severus. I'm sorry... There are so many things on my mind right now. I was... distracted."

'Distracted' was an understatement.

He sensed that she wasn't telling him the whole truth.

"Hmm... Perhaps you might want to enlighten me as to the many things on your mind that have got you distracted? Enough to forget your daily inquiry?"

She looked up suddenly before darting her eyes back down and falling silent.

"Well, while we wait for you to decide when you're going to tell me...and you will tell me," he said as he cupped her chin so she could look into his eyes, "for what kind of husband would I be if my wife couldn't come pour out her troubles...I believe it's time for your monthly potion. *Accio contraception potion.*"

Before the potion could reach his hand, he felt her stiffen again.

Ah.

This is interesting.

When he'd married her five years ago, she'd been twenty-two. Her career at the Ministry of Magic had been blooming. Two years working there as an assistant, she'd been elected head researcher in the Department of New and Improved Spell and Charms Creation. She'd been the youngest appointed to that position in centuries. Not that he'd been surprised, of course.

As it was, she'd been far too young to be married to him, let alone become a mother. They had agreed that they would wait until they were ready. Their baby would be conceived when both parents were anxious to *become* parents, would be welcomed and loved with all their hearts. Until then, he would brew her monthly contraception potion himself. (It was too difficult to remember to drink one just prior to making love; sometimes the urge was so strong, both of them became lost in their desire.)

Initially she'd been hesitant about the idea, saying that *he* must be impatient to have an heir now that he was over forty years old. But for her sake, he had said, "Nonsense. If teaching dunderheads for the last twenty-odd years has taught me anything, it's not to have a child of my own."

"Do you *hate* children, then?" she had asked.

"I do not... hate them. It is simply that it had never crossed my mind before that I might have a child of my own one day. If you hadn't come into my life... I have no trouble waiting rather than have a baby screaming and crying, disrupting this quiet and peaceful domain of mine." If he was honest with himself, though, she'd been right. He had been somewhat anxious to hold a child of his own ever since he'd begun seeing her. But a part of him had doubted if he would be a good father, a better one than his own. Perhaps he needed more time to get used to the idea.

As for their child being a dunderhead... well, all children started out young, didn't they? With both of their brilliant minds, he was sure that their children would perform at least above average. But if having a child hindered Hermione's career, he'd wait. His love for his wife was far stronger than his desire to sire an heir on her.

But now. Ah.

Why would she stiffen when he mentioned that potion? He didn't dare hope. He wanted her happiness first and foremost, after all.

He was still holding the phial when she spoke.

"Severus," she said quietly. He waited for more, but he figured she wanted him to acknowledge that he was listening.

"Yes, Hermione."

"Severus, I've been thinking. Well... God, I don't know how to say this..."

"My lovely, brilliant, young wife cannot string words together to tell me something?" He smirked. "Go on, I'm listening. And I promise I will refrain from any judgment."

"Well... it's like this. You remember Anthony Cuthbert?"

He blinked his eyes. He didn't expect that. What did the senior head researcher of her department have anything to do with his wife being uncomfortable? But he was wiser than to voice that. He'd listen to her explanation.

"Yes."

"Well, he brought his wife to work today. And his new baby. Well, naturally, people started to gather up to... coo at the baby because, you know, all babies are cute. His wife is beautiful too, so added to that... Well, you can't imagine how cute his baby is. I was watching from afar. I mean, I have so many things to do as it is; I don't have time to go over there simply to coo at the baby. But then, his wife came over to my desk, and we chatted for a while. She was holding her baby all that time 'cause, of course, no baby wants to stay away from its mother too long, and besides, what kind of mother would she be if she left her baby alone? And then..." She was talking so fast, he had to strain to catch every word.

"And then?"

She stared up into his eyes, as though suddenly realizing to whom she was talking and where this topic was leading them. She darted her eyes down, and his robes' top button fell victim to her close scrutiny. He didn't want her to stop. For his part, he was beginning to hope and to like the direction of their conversation. So, he prompted her again.

"And then?" he urged with a softer tone.

Her eyes remained level with his poor buttons until, at last, she spoke.

"And then someone came over to my desk and asked her something. She needed to dig something out from her purse, but... well... it all happened so quickly. She handed me her baby, and before I could do anything, I had to get up and accept the little boy. And then..." She paused again.

"Go on."

"I can't quite describe the feeling. The baby's skin was so soft, and he smelled quite nice: fresh and baby-ish. He looked at me, and I was... mesmerized. I... I think we've waited long enough, Severus."

She didn't dare to look up, afraid of his reaction. But if she did, she would see how his eyes glittered before he quickly controlled his emotion. But it seemed he needed to remedy the situation and let her know.

"Hermione," he said, cupping her chin, forcing her to look up, "are you sure?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm sure. I want this," she said determinedly. "I want to have a baby. Your baby."

"*Our* baby."

"You're... you're okay with it? I know you said that you didn't want any childr..."

She was silenced when he delved down and captured her lips. He teased her lower lip, eliciting a soft groan. They spent several minutes teasing and exploring each other's mouth before they got too breathless and had to break off.

"Severus, I have to know. You're okay with this?"

Instead of a straight answer, he kissed her jaw and travelled upward toward her right ear. "Does this look like I'm opposed to the idea?"

"No, it doesn't. But you said..."

"What I said to you regarding the matter was five years ago, Hermione. Even a cold man such as I can change his mind."

"But when?"

"A little over a couple of years ago."

"A couple of years? That long? Why didn't you say something?"

"Because I'd promised that we'd wait. And, after all, *you* will be playing the most important part, as the host and protector of our baby. I didn't want to rush you."

"Rush me?" She shook her head disbelievingly. "And I've been fretting all afternoon, thinking of a way to bring up the news!"

"I apologize. I didn't think you'd be this uncomfortable in letting me know."

"Of course I was, Severus! Your willingness and happiness are my first and foremost concerns. I know I'll be playing the big part, but when I get big and round and can't reach my back or bend to reach my knees, you'll be all I've got."

"To reach your knees?"

"No, silly!" She rolled her eyes. "You're going to be the only support I'll have."

Despite having been called 'silly,' he liked the outcome of this conversation too much to comment. "Of course, I'll support you. You only need to say the word."

"Thank you, Severus. I truly appreciate that," she said, beaming at him, all of her previous tension and stiffness gone. She clutched the front of his robes before licking her

lips suggestively and looking at his lips hungrily. "So..."

He raised his eyebrow. He really was a man of few words.

"Are we going to *do it* now?" she asked, wiggling her eyebrows at him, albeit shyly.

He merely growled before lifting her up on his shoulder and heading to their bedroom, much to her squeaking and gasping mock-protest. "Severus!"

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She was sleeping soundly on her back. He propped himself up on one elbow and shifted to his right to look down at her. At his angel. His saviour from the war within his soul. He still marvelled at what she saw in him, and now she was possibly already carrying his child. Her refusal to drink the contraceptive potion would result in the imminent possibility of conceiving.

He brushed a lock of hair from her face. Her hair was still bushy, but had become quite manageable since her school days. He liked it.

His lips found her temple, and he kissed her gently. She sighed and turned to her side to snuggle closer to him. His arm went around her.

He vowed to keep her safe. His angel. And his future child. Or children. He smirked at the prospect of growing old with her around dark and bushy-haired little boys and girls.

His last thought before drifting off to sleep was that his life and the yearning he'd had for the last couple of years were now fulfilled.

~FIN

Another A/N: *Lepidium peruvianum* is a real plant. It's also known as Maca Seeds, a rosette-forming plant native to the high Peruvian Puna. The way to harvest it, though, is entirely a product of my imagination.

I've read stories in which Severus and Hermione decided to wait before having children. I've read stories in which they were expecting their first child. I wanted to know what came in between: the moment when they finally agreed to have a child. The point of this story is not finding out what distresses Hermione, but rather the way Severus comes to find out what distresses her.

Reviews make my day!