

Better Than Me

by potterbrat

This is a one-shot story set after Hogwarts. It spans the time before and after the Final Battle. Our favorite hero and heroine find each other and then lose each other. What happens when they find each other again?

one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Firstly, I've vowed to never write a song fic. The thing that I don't like about them is that they can be really good or really bad, and there's not much in between. Some of them basically have the lyrics to the song, without much imagination from the author. However, when done right, they can be absolutely beautiful. Secondly, I have vowed never to write a fic with a dead Dumbledore. I love Dumbledore, and I'm in complete denial. So, now, I'm going to break both vows. I heard this song while driving home from work the other day. As I was listening, a little plot bunny hopped out in front of me. I swerved to miss it, and I thought I had. However, the stupid thing followed me home and then to work this morning. It is currently sitting in my lap, being a complete nuisance. Please help me get rid of it, by reading and reviewing this one-shot. Also, I would like to dedicate this to the following: Chocolate Chip, Gardengirl, blue artemis, seleneangel, and sinbad, who have yet to get through one chapter of BROKEN without leaving a review. I feel like I owe you a little something so here it is. As always, thanks to RobisonRocket for making me look good.

Better Than Me

~potterbrat~

inspired by the song: Better Than Me by Hinder

Severus Snape stalked down the hallway of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. It had only been two months since the death of his friend, Albus Dumbledore. A death that Severus knew he would never be able to forget, for it was at his own hands. Dumbledore was the only one who gave him a chance to be someone more than he ever thought he could be.

After the Order was given the opportunity to view Dumbledore's Pensieve, they welcomed Severus back into the fold. Their arms weren't exactly wide open, but they knew it was Dumbledore's plan to save Draco, and the only possible way to do it was for Severus to carry out the Unbreakable Vow.

Severus fought a constant battle with himself. He debated taking his own life, believing that would be his only way to freedom. However, much to Severus' chagrin, Dumbledore ruled his life from the grave. He couldn't kill himself because he had *promised* Dumbledore that he would do whatever it took to bring down the Dark Lord. And once the bloody Boy-Who-Lived got it done, Severus would put himself out of his misery. He actually smiled at the thought.

Before he could relish in thoughts of his own death, Severus had to find some parchment and a quill so he could make a list for ingredients. He had been given the task to make a potion that would destroy the last of the Horcruxes, which was Nagini.

He made his way, swiftly, to the desk in the library. There he found what he was looking for and began to make his list. He assumed that he was alone in the room until he heard someone clear their throat. He grabbed his wand and pointed it at the offender.

"I'm sorry, Professor. I didn't mean to startle you. I was just looking for some reading material."

"Yes, Miss Granger, I can see how a war can become rather boring. I shall be out of your way then." Pocketing his wand, Snape grabbed his parchment and started to stand.

"That's not necessary, Professor; you're not in my way. However, if I'm in *your* way, I can take my leave." Hermione noticeably flushed.

Snape sighed, but didn't respond to her. Instead, he resumed his task of making a list. He was deep in concentration when he heard her clear her throat again.

"Miss Granger, trying out your impression of Dolores Umbridge, or is there something you mean to say?"

"I was just wondering if there was anything I could help you with?"

"No, Miss Granger, there isn't," Severus retorted.

"It's just that I am in desperate need to get my hands dirty. I was wondering if I could help you with Nagini's potion." Hermione jutted her chin upward in defiance.

"I don't take help from adolescent students, Miss Granger. Surely, you know that."

Hermione was standing next to him in a matter of seconds. Far too close, in Severus' opinion. *Merlin, when had she grown up?*

"If you haven't noticed, *Severus*," Hermione challenged, "I'm not your student any longer. Nor am I adolescent. I am an adult now."

Severus' breath quickened slightly. *Minx*. "I guess I haven't noticed, *Hermione*, my apologies," Severus sneered. "Very well, your skills are... adequate. I happen to need an extra pair of hands, or I can assure you, I would not use you."

Hermione flushed at his choice of words. If Severus had been reading her mind, he would have blushed as well.

Two more months had passed without much notice from Severus and Hermione. They had spent many hours working, talking, and arguing. With Harry and Ron, along with everyone else in the Order, including Draco, training, they spent a few meals together as well. Eventually, they fell into a routine.

Severus realized that he had quite a lot in common with the precocious young witch. It seemed like the age line between them had somewhat faded. He found himself thinking about her more often, caring about her opinions and her feelings.

Now, Severus was in his room, deep in thought. He didn't realize that the object of his thoughts had been staring at him for several minutes. She moved closer to him and tapped him on the shoulder.

He turned swiftly, and his eyes met hers immediately. Not knowing why, but more importantly, not knowing why he hadn't done it already, he grabbed her around the waist and kissed her hard on the mouth. He pulled back to see the look in her eyes, silently asking if it was okay. She grabbed his collar and pulled him back against her. This kiss was hungry and full of passion.

Severus grabbed his wand, and after shutting the door, cast a Silencing Charm all without breaking the kiss. He picked her up and moved her to the bed. Kissing, petting, and touching didn't seem to be enough. Clothes were soon strewn all over the room, leaving the couple bare to one another.

Severus didn't give himself time to welcome the shock of having the young witch underneath him. He caressed her breasts with his hands and his tongue. She tried to shy away from him, but he held her still.

"Hermione, do not hide yourself. You are beautiful, and tonight, I'm going to show you how beautiful you are."

"I'm scared, Severus. I want you gods, I want you but I've never done this before."

"Then, if you will allow me, I will make this special for you. Hermione, you need to be sure this is what you want, though. Because if I am to be the first man to ever touch you, I will be the only man you will be mine. Are you ready for that?"

"Yes, Severus, I am ready."

Severus searched her eyes for the truth and found it. "I will be as gentle as possible, but it will hurt at first. However, the pleasure will be the reward for the pain I will cause."

Hermione keened, "*Please*, Severus. I need you, now."

"Shh, patience, little one we have all night."

Severus woke up with something tickling this nose. He chuckled when he realized he was being tickled by someone's hair Hermione's hair.

The deep vibration of his chuckle brought Hermione out of her slumber. She sat up and looked at him through sleepy eyes. "What seems to be so funny, Professor?" she teased.

"I can't recall the last time I woke up with a mouth full of hair. How are you feeling this morning?"

"I'm a bit sore, but I'll be fine. I'll take a potion for the pain. Later, though right now, I want to snuggle up to the Potions master."

It didn't take long for the whole house to know what was going on between the new couple. They didn't try to hide their affection; however, they did try to be discreet.

Harry and Ron were not very happy, but Hermione had put them in their place too many times, and the last place they wanted to be was on the business end of her wand. Ron moped around because he knew he'd lost her, but he came around eventually.

Ginny had taken Harry back after he'd done a great deal of groveling, so he was too busy with his own happiness to endanger anyone else's.

Christmas had sprung upon them, and with it came a summons for Severus. He had been fighting the twinge in his arm as much as possible, but Voldemort had become relentless. Severus didn't want to leave his newfound happiness, but he had made a promise to an old man years before Hermione was even born.

Severus sat on his bed, holding the emerald engagement ring between his fingers, willing himself to put it back in the box. He retrieved the ring from his vault earlier in the

week. It had belonged to his paternal grandmother the only member of his family who ever seemed to love him. He remembered her words like a mantra. She told him to give it to a nice girl one day and have lots of babies. Severus gave a derisive snort at the memory.

Nowhere in the memory did Sophia Snape say, "Severus, become a brooding Death Eater-turned-spy, kill your best friend, shag your former Muggle-born student, and then leave her to complete your destiny."

"Severus! I have the most wonderful news." Hermione burst into his room without knocking. Severus wasn't there. She knocked on the bathroom door, but there was no answer. Hermione looked around the room, confused. Then she spotted it on the bed was a small box with a note lying beside it.

Tremulously, she made her way over to it. She looked at the parchment and noticed her name written in his neat scrawl. She sat down gently on the bed and began to read.

My dearest Hermione,

There are many things about me that you don't know things that you wouldn't understand. You are too young to be saddled with the greasy bat of the dungeons. You are a beautiful and intelligent young woman who has her whole life ahead of her. I have done things in my life that I am extremely ashamed of. Your innocence is worth too much to me to see it destroyed because of the cross I have been destined to bear.

Hermione, these last few months with you have been the best in my life. I have never been happy before, but you gave me something to hold on to. I am not a nice man, nor am I a good man. I know that I have made promises to you; however, I cannot fulfill those promises. I promised my life to an old friend once, and now he is in a tomb. I could not bear it if my sins put you in danger.

I want you to continue with your life and forget about me. I have been given a task for which I must complete. I do not foresee that I will make it out alive. You need to fall in love, get married, have many children, and grow old. I cannot offer you that life, but I will do everything in my power to make sure you have the freedom from the darkness that has fallen upon our world for so long. That is the only thing I can give you, Hermione freedom.

Open the box, Hermione...

Hermione opened the box and almost dropped the letter when she saw the emerald stone, surrounded by round diamonds. She grabbed the letter and continued to read.

My grandmother, Sophia Snape, left me this ring when she died. She was a Muggle, you see, and she believed in love. She told me to give this ring to the woman that I love. I want you to have it, Hermione. Do what you want with it, but please take it, knowing it's given with all the love my heart can hold. Perhaps in our next lifetime, the gods will be on our side.

I do not wish for you to be despondent over me, Hermione. I hope that I was able to bring you some semblance of happiness during our time together. I want you to know that you have been my only light in a lifetime of darkness. I will carry you with me until my last breath. I am content with my own death, for I know that you have saved my soul.

Eternally,

Severus

A few hours later, Harry found her, still in Severus' bedroom. When he opened the door, he called down the hall, "I've found her, Gin." Without waiting for a reply, he slowly approached Hermione, who was lying in a fetal position on Severus' bed. In her hand, she clutched a letter.

Sitting down gently, he put his hand on her back soothingly. "Hermione? Hey, are you okay?"

Hermione raised herself up and grabbed Harry in a tight embrace. She held onto her friend for dear life. Harry, shocked, wrapped his strong arms around her and smoothed her hair. "Hermione, it's okay. I'm here... I'm here...." He held onto her, letting her sob into his neck like a small child. Moments later, she pulled back from him, and he was devastated by her appearance.

"Hermione, what happened? What did he do to you?"

She didn't say anything, just handed him the letter. Barely able to breathe, she waited for him to finish reading.

"Hermione, I'm so sorry. I had no idea that he felt so strongly about you. It sounds like he's saying goodbye for good."

"I know, Harry," Hermione said quietly. "I don't know what I'm going to do. He never told me he loved me. And then he has to write it down in a bloody letter. Why does he have to be such a coward?"

Harry regarded her. "Hermione, he's not a coward. He loves you, and he wants to protect you. I've been there... with Gin. I know what it's like to feel like you don't have anything left, and you just want to protect those that you love the most. It's harder for him, though, because he's right in there with Voldemort. He's treading on thin ice every time he goes. Snape hasn't been summoned for a long time, Hermione. Maybe he knows something that the rest of us don't."

"Then he should have said something," Hermione said bitterly.

"Don't you think he wanted to? The man has been through hell. Everything he's done, he's done for the good of the Wizarding world. He's spent his life repenting for something he did as a child. Hermione, does all of this sound familiar?"

"What do you mean?"

"These are the same words you used when you were trying to convince everyone of his innocence. And that was before you two... well... you know."

Hermione waved a hand dismissively. "Why were you looking for me?"

Harry paled, and Hermione suddenly began to panic. "We just got word from Mad-eye, 'Mione. It's time to go time to fight. Thanks to the potion that you and Snape did for us, Nagini is history. The Order doesn't want to waste any more time."

Hermione buried her face in her hands. "Wait for me in the kitchen. I'll be down in a minute."

Harry kissed her on the top of the head and left her alone with her thoughts.

The remnants of the final battle clouded her vision as she walked through the field of bodies, looking for him. She was afraid to look at the faces of people she knew, people she loved. Harry had vanquished the Dark Lord, and she knew he was safe. Hermione knew that the Weasley family, apart from Percy, had made it out of the battle alive. Lupin would need months of recovery, but she knew he would be fine.

Hermione's robes were tattered, and she had a gash under her eye. But she didn't care. She wouldn't stop looking until she found him.

"I don't think he's here," Ginny said, coming up behind her.

"I have to keep looking, Gin. What if it was Harry? Would you stop looking if it was Harry?"

"That's not fair, Hermione, and you know it. But, to answer your question, yes, I would stop looking for him if I knew I couldn't find him. I'm not telling you that you should stop looking for him. I'm merely saying that I don't think he's here. Hermione, you need to get a hot shower, and you need to go to St. Mungo's to get that nasty cut looked at. I will help you look for him afterwards. I don't care how long it takes."

"Thank you, Ginny. Alright, I'll go."

The girls walked away, unaware of the cloaked figure watching them go.

I think you can do much better than me

After all the lies that I made you believe

Guilt kicks in and I start to see

The edge of the bed

Where your nightgown used to be

I told myself I won't miss you

But I remember

What it feels like beside you

I really miss your hair in my face

And the way your innocence tastes

And I think you should know this

You deserve much better than me

Severus turned from his place behind the tree and stalked away to the Apparation point outside the gates of Hogwarts, the beautiful castle that was now in ruins.

He was too caught up in his own misery to notice he was being followed.

"Snape!"

He turned slowly upon hearing his name and met the eyes of determination. "Congratulations are in order, Potter." Severus tried to sound condescending, but he just didn't have the strength.

"I didn't do it all on my own, Snape. Anyhow, I want to talk to you about Hermione. She loves you; how can you just walk away from her? Do you have any idea what she's been through?"

"I don't know how this is any of your business, Potter," Severus hissed.

"It's my business because Hermione is one of my best friends. I can't stand to see her cry like she does. I can't understand why, but she loves you. The war is over, Snape. Why can't you go back to her?"

"Because I need to protect her."

"From what, exactly?" Harry asked.

"From me," Snape said quietly and then walked away. Harry didn't try to stop him again.

The days turned into weeks, and he watched her from afar. She looked happy when she spoke to her friends. He couldn't help but feel sadness when he noticed the absence of the ring from her finger.

He knew her movements and had become obsessed. He followed her for several weeks when suddenly, she stopped going out. He checked her favorite restaurants, her favorite bookstores.

Severus pondered Hermione's absence for weeks, followed by months. He stalked all over Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. He knew it was hopeless she had moved on without him. But he knew it was his own fault.

He finally spotted her one day. It had been almost a year since he had last seen her. He had been a recluse since the end of the war, taking a much needed sabbatical from his teaching post. Though he was never reported as being amongst the casualties of war, his whereabouts were only known to Minerva McGonagall. She was angry with him for not going to Hermione, but he trusted her and Severus Snape didn't trust many people.

Now it was time to go back to work, which is what put him in Diagon Alley. He stalked by Madam Puddifoot's with a scowl. A customer was exiting the establishment as Severus was passing by. When the door opened, a familiar laugh from inside filled him like a melody. He stopped in his tracks. The laughter drew him in. He peered into the window and saw Hermione. She was laughing hysterically at someone sitting across from her. Instinctively, his eyes moved from her smiling face to the face across from her. It was Potter. She had moved on to Potter.

The bed I'm lying in is getting colder

Wish I never would've said it's over

And I can't pretend... I won't think about you when I'm older

Cause we never really had our closure

This can't be the end

I really miss your hair in my face

And the way your innocence tastes

And I think you should know this

You deserve much better than me

Severus couldn't get up. He was glued to his bed, lost in his own misery. There was so much he thought he should have done. Now it was too late. It was over. She has moved on, and there was nothing he could do. She had forgotten about him. He was so lost in his thoughts it was a few minutes before he heard someone knocking on his door.

He got up and walked mechanically toward the door. "Who is it?" Severus sneered with a little more bite than intended.

"It's Minerva, Severus. Can I speak to you for a moment?"

Sighing, Severus opened the door and allowed her to enter. "What can I do for you?"

"There will be a staff meeting in fifteen minutes, Severus. I want you to attend," McGonagall replied.

"Why, Minerva? I have already sent you a copy of my lesson plan for the term. What could there possibly be to discuss?"

"You know that Professor Vector has resigned, Severus. We have hired a new Arithmancy teacher, and I'd like for you to welcome her."

Severus rolled his eyes in resignation. "Fine, Minerva, I'll be there."

"Good." Minerva left him alone.

Severus opened the door to the staff room and froze. His black gaze met warm honey. The eyes of his love looked at him in as much shock that his own eyes held. It seemed that she didn't know he'd come back. Severus took the only empty seat that happened to be right next to her. His eyes strayed to her hands and saw, to his disappointment, his ring was not on her finger.

The meeting began with the introductions of Professor Hermione Granger as the new Arithmancy teacher. Severus couldn't help but feel slightly betrayed by the Headmistress. How could she hire her? How could she not tell him?

As soon as the meeting was over, he hurried out the door. He had to get away from her. The temptation to fall to his knees and beg forgiveness was too much for him to deal with. He had almost made it to the stairs leading to the dungeons when he heard his name.

He spun around to see Hermione standing there, waiting for him to do something. When she realized he wasn't going to leave, she walked slowly toward him.

"Is there something you need, Professor Granger?"

"Professor Granger is it? I thought that with our history, you could at least call me by my name. I would like for you to come to my quarters; there is someone I'd like for you to meet."

"I already know who it is you want me to meet. Why do you wish for me to make a fool of myself?"

Hermione looked at him in confusion. "When did you meet? I don't recall ever seeing you around. And how on earth could you be made a fool?"

"Do not play games with me, *Hermione*."

"Who said anything about playing games? Listen, I've got go. I am in Vector's old rooms. Just come by at seven o'clock, please. After you leave, you don't ever have to speak to me or my... um... you don't have to speak to us ever again. I just want you to come because, well, you should. It's only right. Harry said that you should know."

"I don't give a damn about what Potter thinks, Hermione. However, if it will get you to leave me alone, I'll be there at seven. Good day, Professor." Before she could respond, he was gone.

Severus was furious. At seven o'clock he was standing outside Hermione's door, seething. *How could she? How could she want me to meet Potter? I've bloody well already met him. She's just doing this to throw it in my face. Damn her!*

He knocked once and waited. He expected the man of the house to answer the door, so he was surprised when Hermione answered.

"I'm glad you didn't change your mind, Severus. I know that you don't want anything to do with me anymore because of some silly nobility of yours; however, it's time for you meet..."

"I don't have a clue why you want me to *meet* Potter. I already know him. Do you just want me to see how happy the two of you are? Do you want me to see what kind of life I could have had?" Severus knew he would regret it, but he couldn't help himself. He raised his voice in the direction of the back bedrooms. "You can come out, Potter! Get this over with! Show me what you've been doing!"

"Severus, what on earth are you on about?" Hermione gasped.

He looked at her dangerously. Words of venom were on the tip of his tongue when he noticed something glimmering from around her neck. Without thinking, he reached out and grabbed it. She didn't make a move to stop him.

He stared at the emerald ring as if he'd never seen it before. He looked into her shining eyes, trying to gain some bit of understanding.

The connection was broken by the sound of a small voice. "Mamamamamama."

Hermione bent down and scooped up the babbling baby, who had just crawled into the room. "That's right; Mummy's here. There's someone I want you to meet."

Severus was pale. He couldn't find a voice to speak what was on his mind. He reached out and touched the curly, black hair on the child's head. "I... I don't understand."

"I do believe that is the first time I've ever known you to be speechless, Severus."

He looked into her eyes and saw the teasing glint. Knowing the answer, but not believing it possible, he asked, "Who is this child?"

"Severus, this is Sophia Jane Snape."

He jerked his head up and looked at Hermione, silently begging her to tell him what he wanted so desperately to be true. "Sophia," he repeated. Without asking permission, he took the baby from her.

It was the strangest feeling he had ever known. He'd never held a baby before. And this baby with black eyes and pale skin he silently thanked the gods that she had her mother's nose. He closed his eyes and inhaled. She smelled so sweet, like she'd just gotten out of the bath. He started to ramble. "W-what sort of potion makes her smell like this?"

Hermione giggled. "It's not a potion; Severus, that's baby lotion."

"Hermione, please help me understand what's going on. I am going to assume that this child is mine, given her last name. Why didn't I know? If you are planning to let Potter raise this child, I'm sorry; I can't let you do that."

"What is all this talk about Harry? I can raise her myself, thank you. Besides, I don't think Ginny would approve if her fiancé wanted to raise another woman's baby, even if I am his best friend."

"I saw you, Hermione. I saw you and Potter through the window of that blasted Puddifoot's."

"Oh, for Circe's sake, Severus, is that what this is about? I guess you saw us there before we were joined by Ginny. We met there for coffee because Puddifoot's has the best cinnamon coffee in all of Britain. Severus, there is no other man in my life. There has only been you. There's only *ever* been you."

Severus held the baby close to him, as if to will her to be real. She had laid her head on his shoulder while he spoke to her mother. "Are you saying that you still love me after all this time?"

"Yes, Severus, I love you. And I didn't tell you about Sophia before because I didn't know where to find you. I tried, Severus; I really tried. She's beautiful, isn't she?"

He nodded. "She's the most beautiful child I've ever laid eyes on. Sophia you named her after my grandmother?"

"Of course I did, Severus. It just made sense. I have to say, your daughter is a very precocious child for a ten-month-old." Not wanting to get off the subject, Hermione regarded him for a moment. "Tell me something do *you* still love *me*?"

"Yes," Severus replied simply. "I have no right to ask you this, but why do you wear that ring around your neck, and not on your finger?"

A tear slid down Hermione's cheek. She turned from him and walked into the sitting room. "Please, sit down."

Severus looked confused for a moment. He was afraid to move. Holding Sophia while standing was one thing, but actually walking with her was quite another.

"She won't break," Hermione said, correctly interpreting his confusion.

Severus unconsciously held the baby a little closer and strode into the sitting room. Taking the seat next to Hermione, he chuckled when Sophia struggled to slide from his grip. He loosened it a bit and started to panic when she extracted herself from his arms and slid to the floor.

"She's fine, Severus. She just wants to crawl around and play. She likes use the table to pull herself up so she can play with the magazines. Watch."

Sure enough, Sophia crawled straight to the table and pulled herself into a standing position. She immediately began to play with the magazines.

"No denying who her mother is," Severus said. "She's already trying to read."

Hermione laughed at that. They sat in companionable silence, watching their daughter play with the several magazines that were strewn across the coffee table. When Severus looked back up at Hermione, he noticed she was staring at him.

"I wanted to wear this ring, Severus. I begged myself to put it on my finger. But I couldn't. I didn't feel it was the right thing to do."

"In the letter I left you, I told you it was yours," Severus replied.

"I know that. As many times as I've read that bloody letter, how could I not know that? But the truth is I have been so angry with you for so long that I just couldn't do it. When Sophia was born, my anger subsided into heartbreak. As much as I wanted to, I still couldn't bring myself to put it on." Hermione paused for a breath.

"Why did you do it, Severus? Why did you leave me? Do you still have your unfortunate need to protect me from yourself?"

Severus didn't even question her meaning. He knew Potter must have told her what he said on the battlefield. "As long as you were part of my life, it wasn't safe. You must understand -- I wasn't supposed to survive."

"And now?" She asked.

"It's not just you I need to worry about anymore." Severus indicated Sophia. "You still haven't answered why you can't put the ring on your finger."

"I thought that would be obvious, Severus. I can't do it because you are the only one who can. You have to put the ring on my finger, Severus. And I've worn it around my neck for the past year and a half, hoping that I would find you. And now I've found you. So the question is for you now. Do you want me to wear this ring?" Hermione reached around and opened the clasp that had been holding her lifeline for so long. She let the ring slide off the chain and into her palm.

Severus took the ring from her hand. While holding the ring, he took her hand slid to his knees onto the floor next to Sophia.

Sophia took her hands off of the table and grasped Severus' arm. She was intrigued by the scene playing out in front of her.

Hermione's eyes were full of tears as she looked on. Here was the man she loved, on his knees, with their daughter, a product of that love. And now said man was placing *the* ring on her finger.

Severus smiled at his daughter, who looked him right in the eye. "I want to thank you, Sophia, for putting your reading aside long enough to help me, because I don't know where I would have gotten the courage to do this without you."

Turning toward Hermione, Severus licked his lips. "Hermione, I did everything I could possibly do to get you to move on. However, you are a grown woman; therefore, you get to choose what kind of life you want to have. I am a miserable, old fool, who has nothing but love to offer you. I would be the talk of the Wizarding world if you would agree to marry me."

"Severus, in all my dreams, I never would have pictured my proposal to be like this. You are a sarcastic, incorrigible arse. But you are *my* sarcastic, incorrigible arse. And I wouldn't have you any other way. I will marry you, and I will make you pay for taking so damn long to ask me."

Hermione leapt into Severus' lap, much to the delight of Sophia. She let go of Severus and clapped her hands, squealing. They looked on in pure amazement as Sophia took two steps toward the settee that Hermione had just vacated.

"Oh, Merlin, Severus, she just took her first steps. Oh, Sophia, I'm so proud of you! Come to Mummy."

Sophia took two more steps and fell into her mother's outstretched arms.

Severus regarded his family with blissful happiness. "It seems as if today is full of first steps."

"Yes, Severus, I believe you're right," Hermione said. Finally, after over a year of waiting, she kissed him.

finite

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this little jaunt into SS/HG world. This has been as much a treat for me as I have intended it to be for you. Now back to my other fic -- Broken. If you haven't had a chance to check it out yet, please do. Don't forget to leave a review -- they inspire me!