

The Promise

by serenity_potterx

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

The Lovers

Chapter 1 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

My Promise

To you I give myself.

To you I bind myself.

For you I shall move the Heavens.

For you nothing is impossible.

With you I shall Dream.

With you I shall Hope.

Because of you I will Live,

Love and Endure the World.

This is my Promise.

Chapter One - The Lovers

She turns between the sheets and wakes from an uneasy sleep. She gazes towards him as he replaces his clothes.

"Don't go..." she begs softly.

"You know I will," he says with a slight turn of his head.

"Stay. Wake up beside me!"

"You know I can't."

"Why do we dance this dance?"

He turns at the door, hesitant for a moment. "Because the dream is far too beautiful for us to dare believe it's real..."

Hermione climbed out of her soft bed, and grumbling, she turned to her mirror and looked at her curly-haired reflection. Her unruly hair was tousled around her face, and the scars were still evident at her neck. She felt empty and lost this morning. Why, oh why, had she had to dream about him last night?

She slipped on her dressing gown and, yawning loudly, descended the stairs. Walking into her small kitchen, she saw that her post had already been delivered. She rifled through the various bills and party invitations to find a letter from Ron. The note was simple, it read:

Dear Hermione,

Fancy a drink later?

Leaky Cauldron, six?

R.

Hermione chuckled quietly to herself; she knew this was Ron being romantic. She wasn't sure about the drink, but trying at least to convince herself that it might remove her mind from the long lost lover she saw in her dreams, sent back her reply:

Sounds perfect.

H.

Hermione entered the Leaky Cauldron later that night with none of the excitement one should have upon attending what was now a third real date. She soon saw Ron sitting at a small table in a corner fiddling with a tumbler, he looked more nervous than usual. Upon seeing her, his face immediately shone and he stood to greet her. Hermione quickly pulled her face into her usual fake smile and approached with a sense of foreboding.

"Hermione, you look gorgeous!" said Ron, his lack of subtlety amusing her.

"Why thank you, Ronald," she replied still smiling slightly.

"May I get you a drink?"

"A glass of wine would be lovely."

Soon Ron returned with the drinks, and their talk turned to the usual post war discussions of who had been caught, who had lost family members and their work at the Ministry of Magic. Ron's conversation did not bore her, but at the same time left her nowhere near satisfied. The evening drew on slowly and eventually Hermione said that she had better be getting home.

The pair strolled out of the pub with a sense of unspoken tension between them, the air reeked of the things they had not said. As the pair said goodbye, Ron, as expected, leant in to kiss her. Not having the strength or real desire to refuse, Hermione allowed him to do so. The kiss was awkward and, she was sorry to admit to herself, nothing compared to the kisses of her black-haired lover. Drawing away Hermione murmure, "Good night, Ron," slowly touched his arm, then turned and Apparated to her home.

Severus lay wide awake in his bed, glancing towards his clock. He saw that it was almost four o'clock and groaned slightly, realizing he had to be up in less than five hours. He was becoming used to these sleepless nights, he realized. This was probably the lesser of two evils, as he would rather lie awake at night than dream endlessly of her curly hair and luscious smell. He rolled out of bed and crossed his moonlit bedroom to the window. He stared out at the empty sky; where was she tonight? Was she alone? Was there a missing space next to her as he felt next to him?

They sit apart. Across the busy room their eyes meet on occasion, and as they do, both hastily drop their gazes back to their fellow companions who sit around them. She longs to sit beside him, he longs to hold her hand, and no one could ever tell, that inside she's breaking, tearing from the seams. The longing for him to hold her fills every aspect of her being. He feels his heartbreak a little more acutely every time he sees for a moment the pain in her eyes. Another woman approaches him, she smiles and flirtatiously touches his arm, lowers herself into his embrace and steals his kiss.

Suddenly Hermione stands, she can't breathe, the room is spinning around her. Not knowing what to do she runs from the hall to the street, and when she turns around the corner, she falls to her knees and allows the convulsions of her sobs to overpower her.

When Severus manages to break the kiss and looks around, it pains him to know she is not there.

Hermione sat at her desk within the Ministry daydreaming. Her mind seemed to have wandered to a faraway place where life is less complicated. Glancing at her calendar she realized that it was only two weeks till the anniversary of the Final Battle. Why had she not remembered that? How could she have forgotten? The war had, of course, changed so many things, so many people had been lost, and after the revelations about Snape, many of her opinions and prejudices had been changed. Sometimes, when she thought about this, she wasn't sure if it was simply the truth about him or the months of him sharing her bed that had changed her mind.

Many had believed that Snape had died in the war, but he had been discovered clinging to life by the fingernails and had been brought back to a relatively healthy state. When she looked back, she wasn't even really sure how it happened between her and Severus. Harry had made sure that the truth was known about him, and to a degree, his name was cleared. This in turn, and helped by the fact he was no longer a spy, enabled Snape to show a different side of himself. Hermione had since admitted to herself that she had always been slightly fascinated with him, his darkness, his mystery. She had, she supposed, always been drawn to him. The affair had happened quickly but, she thought to herself, hadn't it been so much more than an affair?

The pair had both been at a post war event about a month after the Final Battle; it had occurred to Snape that he had never really had a decent conversation with Hermione Granger, and as a result of this, he decided that this should be his task for the night...

Snape approached her cautiously; he was unsure as to how she might react and he so wanted to talk to this girl, just talk... for the moment.

The Web We Weave.

Chapter 2 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

The cold wind echoes around her head as she walks down the darkening street. The butterflies in her stomach don't allow her to notice the milling people all around her on the busy London road. Her steps are full of purpose and they have only one end in mind.

The cold wind echoes around her head as she walks down the darkening street. The butterflies in her stomach don't allow her to notice the milling people all around her on the busy London road. Her steps are full of purpose and they have only one end in mind. She turns the corner onto Charing Cross Road and there she sees him, leaning against a lamppost, his black hair blowing in the wind. She has to stop for a moment as a rush of excitement travels up her body. He came! As she approaches, he seems to sense her and turns his head to meet her eager gaze. Their eyes meet and fix in an ever-holding look. They look for what could have been years before he stands up straight and walks towards her. She suddenly discovers her feet have become planted to the spot.

As he reaches her, her breath becomes more rapid and her chest rises and falls excitedly. She raises her head towards him, and lets out a small gasp as his hand comes to find her hips. He lowers his head towards her and places his mouth on hers. Their lips lock and the thing that they have called reality falls away from around them. This is the realest thing they have ever known.

Why was the normal so hard to endure after having tasted the amazing? Why did she have to sit at her desk day after day making sure that the world around her was working when inside, she was broken, and the idea of her ever feeling like her life had meaning was such a far away thought it didn't seem real.

The things she used to love didn't seem to matter any more. Hadn't she had ideas? Hadn't she wanted to change the world? Was this the same girl who had travelled with Harry Potter towards the finale of Voldemort?

She had never thought that she would allow a man to have such a large impact on the person she was, but even she couldn't deny that the affair with Severus had changed her.

"Miss Granger?"

Hermione turns around sharply. She knows the voice of her old Potions teacher very well. Her long dress makes a low swishing noise as she turns. It is the first time that Snape has noticed it, but she is beautiful. The dress suits her perfectly, but it is more than that. It's the way her hair flows down her over shoulders. The light and easy smile that sweeps across her face. The beauty, longing and hope in her eyes. It moves something inside him that he hadn't thought could ever be moved again.

"Hello, Severus," *she replies.*

He is shocked back into his surroundings by her use of his first name, as this is the first time she has done so.

"I...Um...I..." he mutters, lost for words. His eyes search the room. Surely he should have thought of something to say in response before he had walked over to her.

Still stuttering, he begins: "I was just wondering; would you like to dance?" As soon as the words leave his mouth he regrets them with every part of his being.

'What a damn stupid thing to say', he thinks. 'I think we may have spoken once or twice outside a classroom, but that was hardly appropriate.'

"I'd love to," she stammers back, to his amazement. She doesn't really understand where the words come from, but nonetheless, they exit her mouth loud and clear. 'Oh, well done Hermione, that was smart', she thinks as the pair move to the centre of the crowd.

As they take their positions on the dance floor, hand in hand, hand to waist and hand to shoulder, their eyes meet. Hermione takes a sharp intake of breath at the feeling of those eyes on her. Those eyes that have seen so much, those eyes that cry so many tears, and all for a single woman.

As they begin to dance they play to each other's rhythm. Nothing is wrong, awkward or strange. Everything is perfect. For the first time in a long time for both of them, everything feels right. Hermione falls in love in that moment; the moment she realises that the world has stopped turning.

Hermione looked up from her desk as the sound of Ron's heavy breathing became evident in the room.

"Hey, Hermione, I was just wondering if maybe you wanted to go get some lunch?" he said with so much hope in his voice.

Ron was right on time, Hermione thought, looking at the clock. For the past two weeks, every day, at one thirty, Ron had come to her office and invited her to lunch.

"Sorry, Ron, I'm really busy..."

It was the same reply that she had been giving for the whole two weeks. He gave a small sigh and with a watery smile left the room. She glanced around to her fellow office companion George.

"You're going to have to talk to him eventually," George said knowingly.

'I know,' thought Hermione. 'I just wish I didn't.'

What you left behind.

Chapter 3 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

Chapter Three – What you left behind.

They fall into bed, their hands running over each other. His hands hold her close to him and rustle through her hair. Her body feels small against his strong, muscular frame. His dark hair mats across his eyes, disturbing his vision, adding to the sense of confusion he feels. Is he really doing this? With Hermione Granger? Are they really going to make love? She must have sensed something as she whispers to him.

"Severus?"

He realises this is a question rather than a statement. He knows she's seeking reassurance, and he stops thinking about the fact that he taught her at school, that she hated him for years. He stops thinking that he's probably old enough to be her father.

He stops thinking about Lily.

He lowers his head to hers, kissing her deeply and with more meaning than he has ever kissed anyone with before. He knows he has given her all the reassurance she will ever need. She looks up at him for a final time, at the moment where they could still turn back, the moment before the world changes, and she smiles at him, and in that smile he sees her. He sees that it is a woman that lies beneath him.

He stops thinking. He lowers himself and they are one.

Hermione stared blankly at the wedding invitation that lay on her desk.

It felt like a sick joke. He was getting married. She let her emotions take over and was instantly reduced to the wreck of the woman she once was. Nothing mattered any more. The dream, her beautiful dream, her little piece of heaven had been shattered. Torn apart and ripped into tiny shafts of glass that pierced her heart. She wanted to keep crying, but as the tears rolled down her face the sobs stuck in her chest and hurt just as much as the reason for her tears. She was lost.

Severus stood over his potions desk in his fancy office in London, gazing at the wedding invitation design on his desk and the note from his soon to be wife.

Here is my design for the wedding invitations. No need to worry, I have already sent them out.

See you at home later,

Cecilia.

He almost laughed as he realised what had just happened and as the gravity of what he had done hit him. Once the affair had been broken, he had fought in some twisted way to regain a hold on his life. He met another woman and had foolishly asked her to marry him within only three months of their first date.

His thoughts then turned to the people who would also be reading this invitation, and with a jolt realized that Hermione would be one of those people. He shot to the door, grabbing his dark coat on the way. He needed to get out of this place, go somewhere where he could think. He wandered dismally around the streets of London, Muggles rushing past him on their way to lunches and shopping. He didn't realise where he was going until he was right outside the building, looking straight at the hidden entrance to the Ministry of Magic. The place where she was.

Hermione began to reign in her emotions as the clock stuck four. She was thankful that George had not been in this office today and that Ron somehow had given up upon asking her to lunch. She usually worked until past six, but today she was going home early. Gathering her things, she stood and stumbled to the door, wiping her eyes for the final time.

"Afternoon, Miss Granger," called a passer by. Not looking up to see who it was, she simple trudged on towards the exit.

As she walked out of the Ministry of Magic doors, an icy wave blew over her that had nothing to do with the cold. As if by some sick joke of God, he was standing not ten paces from her.

"NO!" he thought in horror, she wasn't standing there right in front of him. No, he couldn't tell that she'd been crying, and no, she wasn't still the most beautiful thing in this world.

He walked towards her very slowly. Looking deep into her perfect brown eyes, he stopped right in front of her, his voice heavy in his chest.

"Hermione..."

"NOOO!" screeched the voices inside her head. Oh, God, she prayed, let the ground open and swallow her up, let hell keep her for eternity, let her die, let anything happen to her except the awful, irrevocable truth that he was standing right in front of her.

"Hermione..."

His perfect, deep voice uttered her name as if it were a prayer. This was worse than any pain she had thus far endured. His beautiful black eyes calling to her soul, finding and crushing any hope she had left that she might one day live again. Why did no one understand? Why had they never believed that what they once had was real? Why was the rest of the world determined to tell her that she had made a mistake? Why hadn't their love been enough?

She couldn't speak. She had no words to tell him how broken she was.

She simply ran.

A/N: I just wanted to give a massive thank you to my new beta ArtemisofEphesus. She has been absolutely awesome and this fic really wouldn't be what it is without her so thank you.

The Furthest Thing From Me.

Chapter 4 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

Chapter Four - The Furthest Thing From Me.

They lie holding each other. She sighs softly as he runs a hand down her face and lifts her heavy eyes to his. Sleep is ready to take her on its wings, but she wants to talk to him, to clarify the love she feels in words. He presses a finger to her lips; she kisses it and slowly allows herself to slip into unconsciousness. He then slides his hands from around her, quickly slips back into his clothes and leaves.

Hermione didn't look back. She let her feet carry her until she was sure he was lost far, far behind her. She dropped down on an old bench that creaked under her and swayed slightly. A painful memory surfaced in the front of her mind.

Severus looks deep into her beautiful brown eyes and she stares back, tears swelling, a small whimper just waiting to escape her lips.

"Why?" she whispers almost at an inaudible level. It kills him to hear that all the fire that characterises her is lost from her voice.

"Why can't I do this?" he asks blankly.

"Yes."

"It doesn't work any more."

Something about this lack of explanation hurts her even more. Wasn't she even worth that anymore?

He stands and leaves her for the final time. He doesn't look back, knowing that if he does, he'll break, he won't be strong enough to do this. There is so much he wants to say to her. He wants to turn back and shout that he wasn't good enough for her. That he doesn't know how to love her. That having her this close to him hurts him because he doesn't want to cause her any pain of disappointment, and he can't promise that he wouldn't.

He wants to tell her that he'd never before felt as alive as he did when he was with her. That she filled the missing pieces of him. That he loved her with his whole being. But he doesn't. He leaves her behind.

Hermione let the fresh tears roll down her face, not caring that people were staring at her strangely. For some reason this memory was more painful than any other she held. More painful than watching people die during the war, more painful than realizing she didn't love Ron. This memory cut into her like a thousand razor blades each tipped with poison. She remembered all the conversations they'd had. She remembered how they'd both decided early on in the affair that the charade, the visage they portrayed of not being in love was vitally important. She remembered with a stab of guilt that it had been her idea.

Severus stood, still staring at the place that she had been standing just a moment ago. He knew he should run, run after her to comfort her. He knew now he had to tell her the truth, explain it to her so that she understood. But wouldn't that just cause her more pain? Knowing that he loved her but couldn't be with her? He knew that if he followed her, somehow, happiness might ensue. But the self-sacrificing part of him that had been his life for such a long time couldn't easily be silenced. He stared for a long time at the place where she had stood and then slowly walked away. The light of the day was beginning to fade, and in the air he could smell excitement from the Muggles around him, eager to get home to their families after a long day of work. As he walked through the cold streets, he reminisced about the night he had realized he loved her.

He pushes her against the wall with force that emanates from passion. His hands hold hers firmly above her head. Their kiss is energetic, hungry. Ruefully, she pushes back, and he allows himself to be shoved onto her bed where she joins him. For a moment they hold each other, and it feels like they are looking into each other's souls. She looks down, blushing slightly at the realization of the intensity of his stare. A half smile which flickers across his lips masks his lust and need for her.

Later, when the words that always go unspoken between them have been demonstrated by their actions, she lies asleep across his chest. He stares at the ceiling, remembering a poem he had once scoffed at so callously.

You're the dream that hasn't ended,

And I'm still anxious for the rest.

Your words they seem to hang above my head.

You're the bud before the flower,

Unfurls into full bloom.

Captivating beauty,

But it may be all too soon.

You're the song that writes a story,

But leaves a lot to read.

The closest thing to perfect,

But the farthest thing from me.

He realized that this was how he felt. She was everything. Everything, and so, so much more that he had ever wanted. He loved her with every inch of his being. But he'd sacrificed too many years of his life to feel those emotions, to be able to give himself so entirely to a person. So he leaves her sleeping, in an attempt to stop the world from re-forming.

A/N: Massive thanks, once again to ArtemisofEphesus, her patience astounds me. I'm sorry for killing her with my awful grammar.

The poem (which is not actually a poem) and title come from the song "Closest Thing" by Juliana Theory. I don't own it, just borrowing the beautiful words.

Thanks for reading, hopefully it's beginning to make sense.

When We Practice to Deceive

Chapter 5 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

Chapter 5 - When We Practice to Deceive.

After Severus leaves Hermione for the last time, he walks into a pub with only one end in mind. To get drunk. To get so drunk that he can't see her tear-stained face any more. So drunk that he can't smell her on his skin, can't feel her touch and hear her voice whispering his name into the soft air. He walks to the bar and orders a whiskey. Neat. It's not until after the fifth drink that he even notices the woman. He glances to his left to see a thin face, surrounded by black long straight hair, and dark blue eyes staring at him with what could only be described as, well, lust. With the heavy smell of whiskey on his lips, he downs his sixth and staggers towards her. She's not his type. He barley even finds her attractive, but anything – anything – to make him forget those bouncy brown curls. He offers her a drink and with it sells to her what has only ever belonged to one. One who he hopes he has left far, far behind.

The rain fell fast and heavy against the window sill of Ginny Potter's kitchen window. It seemed to be a suitable reflection of her best friend's mood.

The kettle simmered loudly on the fire, and Hermione wiped her eyes again.

"I'm really sorry to burst in on you like this, Ginny. I just didn't know where to go."

Ginny looked at Hermione's tearful face and felt truly awful for her friend's sorrow. Where had the strong, independent woman she had once known gone?

"Hermione, you know you can always come to me if you need someone." Ginny spoke with sincere concern.

"It's just that with him, it was perfect. Nothing else mattered when I was with him. I didn't think about how much pain I'd gone through or caused, I was just me again. The Hermione before the war, before everything became complicated. How can that be over? How can he have not felt the same way? How can he be getting married?" Hermione's voice broke on the last sentence, the pain of this truth still so fresh and so vivid.

"Oh," said Ginny. "This is about him."

Hermione looked up, surprised at the tone in Ginny's voice.

"No, I didn't mean it like that," said Ginny, quick to amend herself. "I just meant, well. I understand why you're so upset now. To be honest, Hermione, I can't believe it either."

Severus slipped through their front door as quietly as possible, praying that he would have a moment to compose himself before the confrontation with his fiancée. Sadly no such moment was allowed.

"Severus, where have you been? We had dinner reservations with the Malfoys at seven. That was two hours ago! I had to call and cancel. I owed your secretary and she said you left at four. Where have you been for the last five hours?" Cecilia screamed at Severus with indignation.

Severus sighed as he prepared to lie through his teeth to his wife-to-be.

"Must you know where I am every second of the day, witch?" Severus spat, pausing for effect. "I left the office early to have a drink with an old friend in regards to a surprise for the wedding day. I may as well tell you about it now, seeing as a man is no longer entitled to any privacy. It lasted longer than expected. I apologise that I had forgotten about the engagement with the Malfoys. However, had I known you were close to sending out a search party, believe me I would have hurried home at once," he hissed with a smirk. He was so good at being an arsehole. His ability to lie was still intact.

Cecilia was silent for a long time as the rain pounded hard against the windows.

"Now, if it's alright with you, my darling," Severus drawled, "I'm going to the study, but don't worry. I'll inform you should I decide to move rooms." He swept past her without a backwards glance, leaving her like a puppy with its tail between its legs.

She stares at the paper, and unreal horror, pain and disbelief floods through her body to her heart, the heart that she wishes would stop beating. The engagement announcement stares her in the face and seems to rip apart his kisses, his touches, the words that always went unsaid but that she was sure were true. The life she believed she had rebuilt shatters around her as the false hopes and futile lies at the pretence of perfection die. He never loved her. She really meant nothing.

Her disguises come more simply now, and even she doesn't know which mask is really hers to hold. She spits the lies of happiness out to those around her like acid. The world of illusion cracks around her and occasionally she breaks, breaks down the walls that are never repaired. Happiness gets harder to feel and easier to fake. Now the people around her even seem to encourage her to pull that broken smile she wears so well. The falseness sinks deep into her core.

"How do you go on, when in your heart you begin to realise there is no going back?"

AN: I'm sorry this fic hasn't been updated in such a long time! I had finally fixed my problem with betas by finding myself a good one, then went and lost her because I suffered an awful case of writer's block. Luckily the lovely Neelix has agreed to beta for me. I had originally intended this fic to be ten chapters long; however, I have decided that the next chapter will be its last. Thank you if you've managed to stick with this fic :)

Also the quote at the end is from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings: The Return of The King* I'm not sure if it's a direct lift from Tolkien or was simply in the film. I borrowed it because I've always loved it and I think it suits Herione in this situation.

Promises: Broken and Kept.

Chapter 6 of 6

Through a series of flashbacks and real time passages, Hermione and Snape re-live their recently ended affair, but some sparks still fly...

Chapter 6: Promises: Broken and Kept.

Hermione awoke to see the pale sunlight hitting her soft white duvet and the pine wood of her bedstead. She rolled onto her side, away from the light, in some futile attempt to stop this sun from rising. To stop this day from breaking. To prolong what this day meant.

Severus awoke to see the pale sunlight hitting his dark sheets and the oak wood of his bedstead. He rolled onto his side in some futile attempt to stop this sun from rising. To prolong the choice that today he must truly make.

In the gaps between their love, between his strengths and weaknesses, between her insecurities and stubbornness, they make a silent promise. A promise that speaks the things that their actions can't demonstrate and that no words can explain. A promise to give themselves to one another, to bind themselves to one another, to move the Heavens, to show the other nothing is impossible, to dream, to hope, to live, love and endure the world. This is their promise.

"Hermione, open the door," Ginny shouted, hammering loudly on Hermione's front door. "I know you're here, just let me up, please!"

Ignoring the good intentions of her friend, Hermione sat on her bed, the feeling of anticipation mixed with guilt and self-loathing festering in her stomach for what she was considering doing. Finally, she rose and went to her front door. Ginny's worry-creased face met her downtrodden stare. A silent exchange of understanding passed between the two friends. They both knew what the elder wanted to do.

Severus Snape was a man who kept his word. He could never have lived his life as a double agent for so long had this not been the truth. He had made a promise to Dumbledore, to Lily's memory, and to himself a long time ago. He would dedicate his life to saving Harry Potter. He had never expected to live past that point. Never had his mind wandered through daydreams of idle happiness in days post-Voldemort. Snape had believed that, if it were possible, having a hand in defeating Voldemort would be his last deed. He had approached the shack that night like a man committing suicide, understanding that he would not wake up in the morning, that he would not see another sunrise, and that he would never be loved. The time he had spent with Hermione felt like time stolen, precious hours of happiness he didn't believe he deserved. They had been his chance for a new life, and like the fool he knew he was, he had let them go.

Severus Snape had made other promises. He had asked a woman to marry him. He had given her a ring and in that moment made a commitment to her that he knew not how to break.

But Severus Snape also knew the silent promises that had gone between himself and Hermione. Severus Snape had two doors open to him. Each one broke his word, and

each kept it.

Severus Snape had a promise to keep.

Cecilia stood in front of an ornate, gold-framed mirror, contemplating her reflection. Her long, white silk gown flowed over her small, slender frame like a waterfall. It sat tightly around her torso and then fell lavishly to the floor, where it pooled in an extravagant train. She gazed at herself pensively, but with arrogant eyes. Her hair had been pulled to an elegant knot towards the back of her head, exposing her long, slender neck. Her dress and adorned jewels were perfect. She was ready.

Cecilia turned to the small room around her, to the table on which her beautiful bouquet of white roses sat. She could hear the guests gathering in the church that this room led to. She could hear the jubilant chatter of her friends and family. She felt a flare of excitement and anticipation in the pit of her stomach. She ran a hand over her dress nervously. There was a knock on the door.

Hermione sat on her bed for a long time with Ginny staring at her.

"Hermione," Ginny began. "You know this isn't the way. What are you going to do, run down the aisle screaming 'NO'?"

There was a sense of desperate pleading in her voice.

"I can't let him marry her, Ginny." Hermione's voice seemed to contain some of the fire she had once been so full of, but that had disappeared after Severus. "I should have fought harder, I shouldn't have let it get this far. If I don't do something, I'll never be able to live with myself." Her eyes fell to the floor.

"Hermione," whispered Ginny's petrified voice, "it's too late, you wouldn't even get there in time."

"I have to try," Hermione said desperately, rushing out of the room.

"Severus, what are you doing? You're not supposed to see me before the wedding!" exclaimed Cecilia, when she had opened the door to reveal Severus, standing there in his wedding suit, his bow tie loose around his neck. There was a sense of panic in her voice, no doubt induced by the decided look upon Severus's face.

"Cecilia..." he began hesitantly.

One night, before he leaves, he falls asleep. Hermione lies awake next to him wondering if this will be the only time she will be the one awake, contemplating.

She remembers the broken person she was after the war and compares it to how alive she feels now.

She's never felt like this, like the person lying next to her is her reason for living. She knows she doesn't appreciate it enough, and that she should work harder to allow him to fully open up. But the truth is, she's scared. What would happen if he left her? In that moment, she could never have imagined how much losing him would destroy her.

You really never do know how much you need something until it's gone.

A murmur ran amongst the waiting wedding crowd, anticipation mixed with something else. Something new. Something was out of place. They had been waiting for far too long...

Hermione left her house that day with unsure intent. An intent that somehow, some way, tomorrow would be better than today, that tonight she would not cry herself to sleep. Somehow, some way, today it would end.

Cecilia listened to him, unusually silent. She let the words rush over her as he told her the truth, the things she knew he'd kept inside. She sat down with a loud thud, one that seemed too loud for her slight frame, and as she looked up at his agonized face, she saw the pleading in his eyes. She met them and silently let him go.

The sun hit Hermione's messy hair as she ran towards the church, the breath catching in her chest and a stitch beginning in her side. She was almost blinded by her sweat and tears. The heat was beating down on her like a spot light, and her feet were slipping slightly on the cobbled streets of London. She rounded a corner at immense speed, leaning at a dangerous angle and almost losing her balance. Suddenly, so quickly she thought she might be hallucinating, a figure appeared before her.

Severus turned from his never to be bride with a strange, strangled emotion in his chest. Joy? Regret? Fear? He walked slowly down the church aisle. The guests noticed he was going the wrong way. The murmur became more pronounced, and then it was less of a murmur, more of a chorus of questions and outrage. He pushed open the heavy doors and was met by a sun that shone with such radiance, he needed no other assurance that what he was doing was right. He let out a broad laugh. He felt like he had left all of his anger and hate, and his jealousy and grief, behind him as the heavy doors closed. He ran. He ran until suddenly, something far too perfect faced him. Only two hundred yards stood between them.

They run towards each other then, after each has taken a moment to silently agree that there will be no more pretending, no more secrets, and no more quashed emotions. They fall into each other's embrace with passionate longing. His hands pull her face to his with a love no man has ever had for a woman before. Or so it seems to the happy couple. He pulls her away slightly to see new tears upon her cheeks, tears of joy. He speaks softly.

"I'm here, and I'm sorry. I'm changed, and I'm asking you to love me."

She gazes at the floor for a moment then she looks back to his eyes.

"I am yours."

-End-

AN: This fanfic has been over a year in the making. In that time I have moved houses, sat my A-levels and am off to uni in three weeks. A lot can happen in a year.

When I first started this fic, this was not the way I pictured it ending. It was going to be very tragic and heartbreaking. The happy ending has a lot to do with the influence of my most recent beta, Neelix. Her help on the last two chapters and previous reviews and support of the fic have really meant a lot. I have a lot of betas to thank, and my gratitude goes out to each one of them. The idea behind this fic was a very personal one to me; after a relationship that re-builds you ends, how do you go on? My ex-boyfriend helped me recover from depression and in turn helped me become the strong person I am today. He then left me. During writing this chapter, I learned that he and his fiancée are now expecting his first child. So in the end Hermione got the happy ending I haven't yet. The Harry Potter community means a lot to me, and putting out my writing like this has been an awesome experience. I apologise for the confusing time loops and for killing my betas with the constant change in tense. I promise that the next one will be more straightforward! Thank you very much for reading.

P.S. If anyone one wants either an Epilogue or how the final chapter *could* have ended, let me know and I'll post.