

# Ever The Same

*by fizzabella*

A fiction for Sunshine, the Southern Witch, in the hope that it will cheer her up.  
Songfic based on "Ever the Same" by Rob Thomas.

## One-shot

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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**Author's Note: Dedicated to Sunshine, the Southern Witch, who fell in love with Rob Thomas's "Ever The Same" and requested a fic based on the song. I hope you enjoy it, Sunshine; this is written with gratitude for all you are and all you have done to help everyone in the universe of Potter Fan Fiction.**

**Special thanks to CharmedForce, who got this BACK to me, beta'd and corrected, within THREE HOURS of my sending it to her with a request that she look it over for me. SHE ROCKS!!!!**

~OoO~

**Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Hogsmeade, Scotland. May 19, 1998 Evening**

"It's over." Harry Potter sat down suddenly in the corridor beyond the gargoyle that guarded the stairway to the Headmaster's office.

Hermione and Ron sank down beside him at once, one on either side of him. Ron slung his arm over Harry's shoulder, and Hermione took his hand.

"You did it, Harry."

"No. Not me alone. We did it. The three of us, and a whole lot of other really good people."

He looked from Hermione to Ron and back again, finally absorbing the sight of the two of them. Ron's jeans were ripped, his hands were covered with dirt. His shirt had little holes in it all over, the result of flying embers from the Room of Requirement. His face was dirty, tear-stained and smudged with soot. His eyes were red and he looked exhausted.

Hermione's clothing had fared a little better, as Ron had shielded her with his body when they'd flown out of the Room of Requirement. The back of her shirt bore sooty handprints, but whether they were from Goyle hanging on to her during his rescue or from when she flew at Ron in the upper hall and kissed him, Harry didn't know.

Hermione's hair was practically standing out from her head in every direction, the frizzy waves somehow retaining their vibrant energy. Neither one had ever looked better to Harry. These two had been with him from the beginning, and it was good to have them here at the end of the battle.

As he looked at the two of them, he remembered reading what Frodo had said at the end of his quest: "I'm glad you're with me, Sam, here at the end of all things." He knew what Frodo meant, even though this was not the end of all things.

It was more like a new beginning.

"Harry, I'm glad we were with you."

"Me too, Harry. I told you you needed us."

He grinned. "When were you ever wrong, Hermione?"

Her answering smile lit her eyes. "Never. So it's just as well that you listened to me."

"What are your plans, Harry?" Ron looked anxious.

"At some point I want to eat, and then I'm just going to keel over and fall asleep. After that...who knows?"

"Come on back down to the Great Hall with me? Both of you? I need to find my family." Ron's mobile features betrayed his anxiety and sadness.

"Yeah, sure."

All three scrambled to their feet. They put Hermione in the middle, each of them putting an arm around her waist, and she put her arms around their shoulders. It had never felt so good to be walking down this corridor together.

Within a few minutes they reached the Great Hall, and Ron looked anxiously around for his family.

Arthur and Molly Weasley were sitting on the bench at the Ravenclaw table, surrounded by their children. Oddly enough to Hermione, Ginny stayed seated on the bench, her head on her mum's shoulder. And she wouldn't look at Harry.

Harry looked at her but didn't say anything or make any move to go to her. If anything, his arm tightened around Hermione.

"Harry, dear." Molly gently pushed Ginny away and got to her feet to engulf Harry in a motherly hug.

"Mrs. Weasley."

Arthur waited till Harry stepped back from Molly, then hugged him tightly. "I couldn't be more proud of you if you were my own son, Harry."

Hermione was hugging Molly now, but she stepped back quickly, as Ginny was looking bereft.

"Mum, Dad, are we going to Auntie Muriel's, or Shell Cottage or what?" Ron was pacing but not straying more than a few feet from his family.

"We're going to Auntie Muriel's, Ron. Everyone will gather there. Your mother and I will have to make funeral arrangements later, but not today."

Mr. Weasley's eyes grew moist, and everyone knew he was referring to the funeral for their son Fred, who'd been killed when part of the castle had collapsed on him.

"Auntie Muriel's expecting us, though. In fact, she expected us an hour ago. Ron, *Apparate* with Percy, please."

Arthur Weasley turned to Harry and Hermione. "Auntie Muriel's told us she only wants the family at her house today. We're not shutting either of you out, but we have to respect her request. I hope you understand?"

Hermione and Harry nodded. "Of course we do, Mr. Weasley. There really aren't words for how we feel about losing Fred. We'll miss him so much. Will you send a Patronus if there's anything we can do?" Hermione's face was sad, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. Harry was glad she had...he couldn't think of any words to express his own grief.

"I will." Mr. Weasley drew the two into his arms for a fatherly hug, but then released them quickly as his family began to *Disapparate*. Bill took Fleur, Percy took Ron, and Charlie took Ginny, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Weasley to escort George.

Hermione and Harry backed away, but Harry slung his arm over Hermione's shoulder. "Is this ok? I feel like I want to hold on to you and not let go."

"Sure, Harry."

"Come on, let's find a place we can sit down and relax. Maybe get something to eat. I wonder if the Gryffindor common room is safe."

"Well, we could walk up that way and see if there is damage."

"Yeah. Okay."

Together they turned towards the staircase, their feet automatically carrying them down familiar corridors. After six years at Hogwarts, either of them could have walked up to the Gryffindor common room blindfolded, except for the moving staircases. The damage lessened the higher up they went, and by the time they got to the seventh floor, the hallway looked almost normal.

The Fat Lady was sitting in her portrait fretting until she saw Harry and Hermione.

"You *must* tell me what's happened. The other portraits are saying there's been a battle and the castle is falling down."

"There was a battle but it's over. The castle took some damage, but it will be repaired soon." Hermione spoke reassuringly and the Fat Lady seemed to relax.

"Can you let us into the common room, please?" Harry flashed an appealing grin at the portrait, and the Fat Lady swung the door open.

"The wards are down, so I couldn't actually keep you out anyway," she admitted. "But I remember both of you and you belong to this house. So I guess it's okay if I let you in."

"We really appreciate it. Thank you very much."

Hermione gave the Fat Lady a sweet smile and followed Harry into the Gryffindor common room.

The room looked much as it always had, with squashy armchairs and overstuffed sofas. As if sensing their presence, fires leapt to life in the fireplace and the candles in the wall sconces, bathing the room in warm golden lights.

Hermione and Harry ambled over to the sofa where they had passed so many evenings studying, and they each took a long, nostalgic look around the room. Then they collapsed onto the sofa side by side, sitting closer together than they usually did. Somehow, closer felt better after all they'd gone through.

"It looks the same, and that feels really...strange. I don't know why I expected it to look different."

"I think we've changed so much that we expect everything to look different, Harry."

"Maybe that's it."

He covered her hand with his, but then wrapped his arm around her shoulder instead. As though it were a signal she'd been waiting for, Hermione half turned to face him, wrapped her arms around his waist and burrowed her head into his shoulder. Only then did she let the tears fall, unsurprised to find that Harry was crying, too. They both had been forced to the breaking point, and the stress had to be released or they would shatter.

Neither of them could tell how long they cried together, but when they drew apart, Hermione felt like she would never be able to cry again, that she had cried an entire lifetime's worth of tears.

"I'm so glad it's over, Harry."

He nodded his head. "Me too. And I'm glad you're okay. You are okay, right?"

His green eyes were searching her face, and she nodded. "I'm okay, Harry. I promise."

"This has all been really frightening, but the absolute scariest part was when we were down in the cellar at Malfoy Manor and we could hear you screaming."

He drew her close once again, resting his head on her hair and savoring the knowledge that this fragile, brilliant witch, truly his best friend, was safe. "I thought...I don't really know what I thought, but it was horrible to hear you scream and know someone was hurting you. I think I would have gone at the walls of the cellar with my bare hands if Dobby hadn't come in. And Ron was just as bad, maybe worse."

Hermione wondered at that but didn't say anything.

"You two finally snogged, though."

Hermione began to giggle, and a moment later, Harry chuckled along with her.

"Yes, we did. But..."

"But what?" Harry tipped her chin up so she had to look into his eyes.

"Well, it was just kind of the heat of the moment, Harry. It's not going to last, I don't think."

"What do you mean?" And why did he suddenly feel as though his entire life depended on her next words?

"While you were in the forest, Lavender got stepped on by one of the Dark Lord's giants. Ron saw it happen and brought her in. He was desperately worried. Lavender will recover, Madam Pomfrey says, but I think it made him realize he really cares about her. He was hanging over her cot and practically counting her pulse himself. I think they will wind up together. I mean, I kissed him, not the other way around."

Hermione was speaking about the incident as casually as if she was talking about a homework assignment, and hope, kind of like the gentle flame of a candle, began to flicker in Harry's heart.

"If he'd choose Lavender over you, he's a right stupid git who doesn't know a good thing when it hits him over the head." Where had that come from, Harry wondered. But he was sick of Ron taking Hermione for granted. Maybe he'd tell him that one of these days.

"Actually, Harry, I think it's good. Lavender is a much better match for Ron than I will ever be."

"But last year, he was the love of your life." Harry looked bewildered, but there was something else there, too, something that Hermione couldn't put a name to.

"Harry, I was feeling horribly insecure. You were doing better than me in Potions and you had Ginny and you were the Quidditch Captain. I think I thought that if Ron was my boyfriend, it would mean...well, that I was worthwhile, too."

He stroked her hair back from her face and rested his forehead against hers. "You're worth ten of me, Hermione. And ten of Ron. Don't you know how important you are?"

Hermione found herself having a hard time drawing breath. "Oh no, Harry. You're the Chosen One. It was always you."

Now he tilted his head so that he could brush his mouth over hers, so softly that she felt as if she must be made of spun sugar, infinitely fragile and precious.

"No, it's always been you, Hermione. I just didn't realize it till I saw you kiss Ron."

At his whispered words, Hermione felt something shift in her mind and heart, as if something had finally clicked into place. "Harry, we've never...it's always been Ginny for you and Ron for me. What's changed?"

His arms tightened around her.

"It's not that something's changed. It's that I've finally seen you for what you are. And you're the one who's always been there for me. We've been fighting this bloody war for so long...since we were first years. And tonight you let me hold you while you fell apart, and I wondered why I haven't been the one to comfort you all along."

"This is wonderful but so strange. You're still Harry, but I never let myself realize how much I wanted you to love me."

She raised her fingers to his lips, tracing their outline with a trembling finger. That same finger delicately stroked across his forehead, sweeping his hair out of the way, then soothed its way over the scar on his forehead. "Why didn't I see before?"

"I was as blind as you, Hermione. But I heard a song on the wireless at the beginning of 6th year that made me think of you. I don't know who the bloke is that sang it or what it was called. I think it went like this." He frowned and tried to pull the words out of his memory, then began to sing softly.

*We were drawn from the weeds*

*We were brave like soldiers*

*Falling down under the pale moonlight*

*You were holding to me*

*Like a someone broken*

*And I couldn't tell you but I'm telling you now*

*Just let me hold you while you're falling apart*

*Just let me hold you and we'll both fall down*

*Fall on me*

*Tell me everything you want me to be*

*Forever with you forever in me*

*Ever the same*

*We would stand in the wind*

*We were free like water*

*Flowing down*

*Under the warmth of the sun*

*Now it's cold and we're scared*

*And we've both been shaken*

*Hey, look at us*

*Man, this doesn't need to be the end*

He looked into her eyes and stroked her hair back from her face again. When he spoke, it was in a hushed, almost reverent, whisper.

"You're so much a part of my life that I didn't realize how important you are till I thought I was going to lose you."

"Harry, will you pinch me? Hard?" There were tears in her voice.

He gave her a startled look. "I couldn't hurt you, Hermione."

Her smile was like the sun coming up. "Harry, I just need to know I'm really awake and not just dreaming this."

"I won't pinch you. But maybe this would be just as good." He leaned down and kissed her, deeply, passionately, then gently nipping her bottom lip as emphasis, so she would know she was awake.

"I love you, Hermione."

"I love you, too, Harry."

He started to laugh.

"Harry?"

"It's just strange to hear you not adding three pages of description, 'Mione."

She giggled. "You mean like, 'I love you totally?'"

"Yeah. Or more like, 'I love you, presumably because we have been together as friends for so long that it makes sense that my feelings would grow and deepen with time.'"

She gently bit the end of his nose. "I'm not THAT bad."

"No, but you're fun to tease." He leaned back against the cushions and pulled her onto his lap, yawning hugely as she settled herself in his arms.

"Oh, Harry! I'm being so selfish, keeping you awake. You must be exhausted."

"This feels good, though. It feels right. It's new, and yet it feels like I've been with you like this forever."

"Ever the same." Her voice came sleepily from somewhere near his collarbone.

"Say again?"

"That's the song. I remember it now."

"Yeah. Okay, right. I knew that."

A muffled chuckle. "No you didn't. But I did. Go to sleep, Harry."

"Sounds like a really good idea. I love you, Hermione."

"Love you, too."

As they drifted into sleep, the fire banked itself and the candles dimmed, the castle itself adjusting for their comfort in silent benediction over the Chosen One and the Know-It-All.

~OoO~

Mischief managed.