

Here With Me

by lilyginny27

What happens when it is time to rebuild. Based on Dido's "Here with me."

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I Don't own them. I'm just playing with them for awhile.

A/N: Thanks go to Lightdoggyday and Vix for being my betas, and to ladyinthecloak for the encouragement. Kisses!

I didn't hear you leave

I wonder how am I still here

And I don't want to move a thing

It might change my memory

She couldn't believe he left. It was a whirlwind romance, the stuff they wrote about in the trashy romance novels her mother used to read. One characterized by the maelstrom of emotions of two people realizing that they were still alive in the midst of a field of death.

Everything around them was either burned or completely and utterly destroyed in what was now referred to as The Final Battle. While the Dark Lord was defeated, most everyone she knew had been killed in the process. The only Order of the Phoenix members still standing at the end of that fateful day besides her could be counted on one hand alone: Molly Weasley, Charlie Weasley, Remus Lupin, the Squib Arabella Figg, and Severus Snape.

Severus....

He had found Hermione on the battlefield, half covered by Ron Weasley's limp and lifeless form. She had been hit with multiple *Crucios* by Lucius Malfoy and was writhing in pain. Ron had jumped in front of her when the blond bastard decided to end the game and cast the Killing Curse at her shaking form. It was then that her dark angel descended and swiftly broke the neck of his former friend. It struck her as the greatest irony that the most devout Muggle hater in pureblood society was killed in such a Muggle fashion. She passed out as the surge of magical energy wafted over the bloody battlefield as Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort destroyed each other. *Neither can live while the other survives.*

He had brought her to his home, to Spinner's End, to nurse her back to health. He didn't trust to leave her alone at St. Mungo's, and after having suffered the effects of *Crucio* himself, he knew how to effectively treat it.

Dumbledore's Pensieve and letters written to Minerva McGonagall as well as the Minister of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, vindicated the Potions master of the Headmaster's death during the war. He had continued on as a spy for the Order, and then the Ministry, and lived hidden away at his home by the mill under the *Fidelius* Charm. When not

being summoned to a revel or giving over the latest information to the Order, that is. He was still amazed that the Minister was able to keep his double agent status a secret from the witches and wizards under Lord Voldemort's command who worked in the Ministry.

Oh I am what I am

I'll do what I want

But I can't hide

Severus had suffered from his own wounds during the war, not just visible ones. While he had grown accustomed to the violence and physical pain over the years, to kill his mentor on the Astronomy Tower had shaken him greatly. At first Hermione hadn't been able to forgive him for the death of the Headmaster, but over time and as the war dragged on, she was able to see the reasoning, understand, accept and hence comfort him when the memory would creep up on him in unexpected moments.

After the war she had nowhere else to go and was glad he had allowed her to stay in his home. Hogwarts had suffered heavy damage and was under repair. Since Hermione was no longer a student, having passed her N.E.W.T.s the year before, she could not have returned had she wanted to. Her parents had been burned to death in their home months before, murdered by the Death Eaters in their sleep. She didn't feel comfortable enough to experience the memories of number twelve, Grimmauld Place, never feeling at home in the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, and the Burrow.... Well, she didn't think she could look at red hair without bursting into tears after Ron's sacrifice, and the more Molly tried to mother her, the more she couldn't handle it. She had a mother and she was gone. She didn't need a replacement. So she stayed. With him.

In their combined grief for the ones they had loved and lost, they took care of each other. He for Albus and Minerva, two people who were like the mother and father he should have had. She for her parents and Harry and Ron, as well as everyone else she had known and cared for. As word spread of known survivors, they were thankful for the secrecy charm that surrounded them. He had made himself Secret Keeper of Spinner's End and was forever thankful he had that control. Only the survivors were given permission to enter, though Arabella Figg never took him up on the offer. Being a Squib, it was too long a journey.

At first they were uncomfortable in each other's presence, yet they couldn't stand to be alone. As she recuperated, he stayed by her side, bringing her meals and helping her move about. She would wake at night to find him in the chair at her bedside, sometimes sleeping, others reading.

And I won't go

I won't sleep

I can't breathe

Until you're resting here with me

She came to him at night.

The first night she awoke, and he wasn't lounging in the chair by her side. She was fully recovered, at least physically, and he did not feel it necessary to continue his nightly ritual. So she went to his room and slipped into his bed. When he awoke to the feel of the mattress moving, he didn't say a word. He just turned on his side and opened his arms to engulf her in his warm embrace.

He never asked her to stay in his bed. At first it was just as it was. Sometime in the night she would creep in and lay by his side, needing the presence of someone she knew. Someone who knew her from *before*, before the day she lost everyone she had loved.

When the memories would overtake her, he would soothe her with soft words in the night, holding her in his arms, stroking her curly brown hair. When he awoke from a particularly nasty dream, panting from fear that the war wasn't over, she would take him in her arms and rock him back to sleep, humming softly as he fell back into slumber with his head upon her chest.

And I won't leave

I can't hide

I cannot be

Until you are resting here with me

It was during one of these tender moments that passion started to overtake them and the need to feel again became foremost in their minds. What started out as a slow and tender caress turned into a fiery bout of passion, clawing at each other, ripping the clothing from their bodies, not bothering to take the time to properly remove them. Even in his sleep, his night clothes were covered in buttons, and they went flying as she yanked the satin of his night shirt from his frame. As he ripped the fabric of her flannel gown and took her for the first time, they both cried, releasing the emotions neither of them had allowed the other to see in the harsh morning light.

As time went by, they slowly began to heal. She started to smile again. He started working with his precious potions once more. They began to venture away from Spinner's End and always to Muggle neighborhoods where no one would recognize their faces. Their greatest retreat was a bench in a local park. It wasn't a well cared for park: the fence was missing a few boards, litter was strewn about, the river by its side dirty and clogged with waste. But it was quiet and comfortable, and no one bothered them. They would bring a book each and take turns resting their head in the other's lap, lazing the afternoon away, trying to enjoy life once more.

She told him she loved him. That she needed him and only him by her side. That she was lost without him. He thought she was healing, that she had moved on in her grief. It was only in the dead of night, when she said those often used words of love, that he knew she had not and the face she showed in the light of day was only a mask of denial. He never repeated the words back to her. He would just take her in his arms and stroke her hair, resting her head close to his heart and murmuring, 'I know, I know...' in her ear.

I don't want to call my friends

For they might wake me from this dream

And I don't want to leave this bed

Risk forgetting all that's been

He was offered the position of Headmaster at Hogwarts. The Ministry had been rebuilding the school since the field had been cleared after the final battle. She didn't want him to take the job. She didn't want him to leave her, and the thought of having to face the field where so many had perished gave her nightmares. Things were fine the way they were. Why did he want to leave and go back there?

He told her everything would be fine, that he would take care of her.

Just as she needed someone to cling to, who had known *herbefore*, he did as well. Yet, he understood the need for the school to reopen. This was their first and only argument, and it was just as fiery hot with passion as when they first came together. She begged him not to leave her. He begged her to go with him. Only her fear of facing the one place she had once considered home, that now carried the taint of too much bloodshed and loss, kept her from accompanying him. He railed at her to get past her

grief and move on with life.

She couldn't.

He left anyway. If she truly loved him as she said she did, she would have come with him and faced her fears.

Oh I am what I am

I'll do what I want

But I can't hide

She started visiting the few remaining survivors from that fateful day. The thought of being at Spinner's End without Severus was the equivalent of losing everyone else all over again. *She couldn't believe he left her!* While she still thought she had nowhere else to go, the idea of spending every day alone in the house was unnerving; there were too many memories. While most of them were good, he had still left her there alone. And that one reason was enough to drive her to seek other people.

Molly had taken a position in the cafeteria at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. She just couldn't get over her habit of cooking for large groups of people. With only Charlie at home, she needed the noise, too. Whenever Hermione visited with the Weasley matriarch, she would be plied with food for a week.

Remus Lupin was quiet and looked more ragged than ever, a haunting presence with only the screaming portrait of Mrs. Black for company at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Even though he was a war hero, his werewolf status was now too well known, and he had an even harder time trying to find a job. He was existing solely on the meals Molly provided him with and what little work he could find in the Muggle world.

Hermione had only encountered Arabella Figg at a few Order meetings, and most of what she knew of the Squib were stories Harry had told her from his days living with the Dursleys. She desperately missed her cat, Crookshanks, and knew the Squib had multiples at her home in Little Whinging. Without Severus, she needed something to hold even for a little while.

And I won't go

I won't sleep

I can't breathe

Until you're resting here with me

Her nights became restless without him at her side. The bed they had shared became a torment of memories to her, and she had taken to sleeping on the couch. He would write to her daily, sending money, begging her to reconsider and join him at the school. The repairs at Hogwarts were almost completed, and he wanted her by his side for the new term, but only if she was willing to move on to the next stage of her grief and face her fears.

After he first left, she would throw the letters in the fire without reading them. *He had left her! How could he have done that?* So many people were gone, and didn't he know how his leaving was just the icing on the proverbial cake of loss she was experiencing? The need to flee her home, the sweet memories they had shared and the brief happiness he gave her were overwhelming. She would visit with Remus, or Molly, or Arabella Figg often. Even though she knew he was low on funds, Remus would always give her a few Galleons for food and basic necessities. She would always fight him, but would accept in the end. She had no job, and she wasn't ready to face the world yet.

During her visits, she took note of the fact that Remus and Molly were growing closer. Each had lost the loves of their lives in Nymphadora Tonks and Arthur Weasley and needed someone to fill the hole in their hearts. She understood, and yet, when Molly tried to press Charlie onto her, she balked. She was in love with Severus, she'd say, even if he had left her.

Over time she started to read the letters that she received (like clockwork) every morning. Somehow, Remus knew about them and convinced her how things could have been better if she just listened to what Severus had to say. So she would bring the letter to the bench in the park they used to laze away their days on, to read them in the peace and solitude.

The words he had never spoken were written on the pages he had sent. This, combined with the renewed hope and love she saw in her friends, helped to bring her out of her despair. She had lost so much! If she could just forgive him for leaving her in her time of need, maybe she could find the peace she needed to face her fears.....

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Severus hadn't wanted to leave her. But when Minister Scrimgeour offered him the Headmastership, he couldn't turn it down either. Finally! Somebody was willing to recognize him for all the hard work he had put in to defeat Lord Voldemort. He felt that he deserved the recognition and was loath to turn the job down. He needed to do something. They had spent months holed up in Spinner's End, and while he delighted in her company and never wanted to be parted from her, he felt it was time to move on and rebuild.

He knew she had not properly grieved the deaths of her friends and family. She had made it through the war on adrenalin alone. When he saw her being tortured by Lucius Malfoy, something had snapped in him. As he had rushed to get to Lucius, he had seen the youngest Weasley boy take the Killing Curse for her. It had been through years of stealth that he had been able to get close enough to Lucius to break his neck. To use magic had never crossed his weary mind. After the battle was over, he had carried her off the battlefield to the nearest Apparition point.

She didn't know it, but the most famous image from the battle was of him carrying her slack form up the hill towards Hogsmeade, his head bowed, his face covered in tears, the smoking, charred landscape filled with the bodies of friends and enemies behind them. She was one of the few he had found still breathing. The thought of losing such a brilliant, kind, innocent girl was too much to bear. He would have saved her if it was the last thing he did.

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He hated himself for leaving her, yet he knew that if he didn't, she would just continue to hide behind her feelings for him, simply because she couldn't deal with her friends' deaths yet. At times she seemed to accept their deaths, but that wasn't always the case. Just like when falling off a broom, you need to get back on and conquer your fears as soon as possible. He knew the longer Hermione put off returning to Hogwarts, the harder it would be for her when she did.

Remus Lupin kept Severus updated as to how she was doing in his absence. She had yet to write him in return to any of his letters, and he was worried. He gave the werewolf funds for her in case she was disposing of his letters without reading them. He would have thrown the letters away himself if their positions were reversed. Severus even threw in a little extra for the werewolf. He knew she was upset for his leaving her, but he knew it was for the best. Sometimes the only way to get past one pain is to experience another.

She had told him that she loved him, but he didn't know if she actually did. Did she just transfer her feelings for her friends to him in the wake of the battle? Was she just clinging to him so desperately because he had saved her life, nursed her back to health, and was *there*? He needed to know. He needed to step back and let her have some space to come to terms with her feelings. If she loved him as she said she did, she would come, ready to face her fears.

He loved her.

Over their months together he had fallen in love with her. He didn't think he could bear it if she didn't return his feelings. What if she just wanted his body to warm her nights? What he couldn't tell her as he held her in his arms, he told her in his letters to her. Along with the mundane details of the rebuilding, re-staffing, and re-everything he was dealing with, he expressed his love. For her...

I won't leave

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Until you're resting here with me

The new term had started. The students had returned, classes had resumed, and everyone was doing their best to forget the reign of terror inflicted upon them by Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. He was sitting in his office when he received word about a visitor wanting to see him. A visitor who would not even enter the grounds without seeing him first.

Expecting another Ministry official telling him how the wards should have been placed or some other such nonsense, he grudgingly walked out of the school and across the open field to the gates.

As he got closer, he saw her.

She was standing there with her hair blowing free in the wind with a suitcase in her hand.

He knew then what it felt like to be loved.

"You're here," he whispered, not really believing that she was there, standing before him.

"I am," she replied. "I got your letters. I couldn't read them at first, I was too angry. I saved them when I did. Start to read them, I mean. It took me awhile, but I understand now. Not returning is almost like letting him win, isn't it? Keeping me from the one I love. I was letting him win even in death."

"You love me?"

"Yes."

"Welcome home, my love," he said as he crushed her to him in a blazing kiss of passion.

She dropped her suitcase, reached up and threaded her fingers through his long black hair, pulling his head closer to her own to deepen their kiss. His arms came around her to wrap her tighter in his warm embrace, his hands spread across her back.

After what felt like an eternity, yet not long enough, they started to pull away, only to look into each others' eyes, trying to read what the other was thinking. Silent tears were coloring her cheeks, yet her eyes were shining, not in sadness, but in joy.

"Thank you for waiting for me," she said, a slight smile on her lips.

"Thank you for being here with me, Hermione," he answered, shining the first real smile he'd had in ages.

With that, he placed her arm on the crook of his elbow, took her suitcase in hand, and led her up to the castle.