

Wasted Time

by CharmedForce

A short look at Hermione's life after Hogwarts, and how sometimes the one person we spend so much time looking for is right next to us the whole way.

One

Chapter 1 of 3

A short look at Hermione's life after Hogwarts, and how sometimes the one person we spend so much time looking for is right next to us the whole way.

Disclaimer: Standard--not mine. Only borrowing the characters.

Special Thanks to my betas: Lissy, Blondie, and Darry. Lubbers joo.

Run. Just keep running. He can't catch you if you just keep running.

Run. Just keep running.

The words were her mantra as she moved through the castle. She had no destination, just the urge to keep moving--always moving. She turned a corner sharply and slipped on the slick stones, crying out as she hit the ground. Too tired to move, too tired to care, she lay there sobbing. Feeling arms grasp her, she opened her mouth to scream before she caught his scent. As she recognised him she lunged forward and buried her face in his chest. She could feel his hands moving around her body, checking her for injuries, before his arms encircled her, and he pulled her onto his lap. Cradling her like a small child, he began stroking her hair and making soothing noises in an attempt to calm her.

After several minutes her sobs had subsided, and her voice whispered against his chest. "How could he do this to me? I don't understand. I thought we were happy."

"Were you really happy? Or were you merely satisfied?" he asked her.

"Of course we were happy!" she cried. "We've been together for nearly three years. We had plans and goals. Our life together was all planned out."

"None of that explains whether you were happy or not," he replied evenly.

"We were in love. We were happy. We were young, and we had our whole lives ahead of us. And he just threw it all away! Why? What does she have that I don't?" Her tears were still flowing steadily from her eyes, pooling into the fabric of his robes as she pressed her face against his chest.

"Miss Granger, you are not lacking at all. It is he that is lacking. He lacks respect, he lacks honour, and he lacks common courtesy. Frankly I am amazed you were able to put up with him for as long as you did. You outclass him in every way."

"Except blood. She is a Pureblood, just like Ron. That is the only thing she has that I don't," she said, giving voice to her darkest fear.

She bit back a cry as he grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. His voice was filled with the same fierce rage that was displayed on his face. "Don't you ever say that again! One drop of your so-called Mudblood is worth more than every pint in her body. You have more magic in your smallest finger than she could ever hope to have. You are the future of the Wizarding world, Miss Granger, not Purebloods like the Weasleys and the Parkinsons."

The look of shock she exhibited was replaced by a queer look before she descended in laughter. She was soon hysterical, and he had no choice but to let her get it out of her system. When she had regained enough control to speak, she apologised. "I just had the worst thought. Can you even imagine if they procreate?"

At his grimace she began laughing once more. "I daresay that would be the most stupid and frighteningly ugly child," he muttered. "Oh, dear Merlin, I'll have nightmares of a red-headed, pug-faced dunderhead who does nothing but whinge, eat and blow up cauldrons. Thank you, you have now stolen the last remaining hours of sleep I get each night. I shall be sure to mention to Minerva that I fully blame you so she may carve the appropriate epithet on my gravestone. How does 'It was all Miss Granger's fault' sound to you?"

Another chuckle escaped from her before she could stop it. She took a few breaths to steady herself, but the tears slipped again. He pulled her close and began smoothing her hair as she wept silently.

His voice dropped lower as he tried once again to comfort her. "It may seem like the pain will never end, and maybe it won't, but all you can do now is live from day to day. Focus on what you are doing now, and let the tomorrows handle themselves. You have two years left on your apprenticeship before you need to make any decisions. Be secure in the knowledge that you are working toward a goal that will reward you far better than a cheating lover."

She continued to sniffle against him for several minutes before pulling back to wipe at her face. He held out his handkerchief for her to use, and she took it gratefully. After cleaning herself up, she looked at him. "Why are you being so nice to me?" she asked quietly.

His dark eyes locked onto hers and narrowed. "You and I are not so different, Miss Granger. Our intelligence sets us apart from our peers, our independence solidifies the gap. It will only be a matter of time before your friends give up on you the way your beau did."

"My friends won't give up on me. We've been through too much to do so."

"So you say now. But I have no doubt that your young Mr. Weasley has already returned to Grimmauld Place where he is regaling the rest of your friends with the story of how you wronged him, of how you slighted him. As I am sure you hexed him backwards and forwards when you caught him in flagrante delicto with Miss Parkinson, his story will be the more readily believed one. Besides, you are just a friend. Miss Weasley can hardly turn her back on her brother, especially after the situation with Percy, and I do believe there is already a history of Potter taking Weasley's side over your own, is there not?" He paused to let his words wash over her. When he saw her bite her lower lip, he continued. "I don't mean to hurt you further, but I do believe you are old enough and mature enough to handle the change. You are apprenticing to a Master, researching and working toward a goal, while Potter and Weasley simply play a game every day. They have yet to grow up. Just look at the way Potter handled Miss Weasley. When they were dating he walked all over her and paid her little attention. Even in the way he broke things off you could tell he didn't really care about her feelings. The fact that he keeps going back to her whenever he gets bored is another example of his selfishness and immaturity. You would never do that. You took care of Weasley as much as he would allow."

"He said I didn't need him. That I made him feel like less than a man when I insisted on doing things myself."

"Miss Granger, Weasley should have been proud that such an amazing person as you was willing to be with someone as insignificant as himself. The fact that he couldn't grasp that concept shows that he is the one at fault. One day you will find comfort and true friendship with people who can understand you. I have no doubt that you have begun to see that here at Hogwarts among the staff."

"I do feel more accepted here than with many of my friends."

"Well, you were smart to take that year off after your graduation. I know many people failed to understand your reasons for doing so, but I was not one of them. Escaping from the madness in the Wizarding world for even that short time allowed you to refocus. I can see it in the way you work. You are much more driven, but you have only begun to grow up. Maybe one day you will actually be an adult. I daresay that is more likely than Weasley managing to play professional Quidditch for very much longer."

She sniffed quietly. "That was why I asked for time off this evening. He lost his starting position, and I wanted to be there for him. I didn't... I didn't think that he would be finding comfort with that cow!"

She took a deep breath and exhaled. "I won't do this. I won't be this weak." A gleam of appreciation flashed quickly in his eyes. "He accused me of being cold, but he hasn't seen anything yet. He can turn all my friends against me, but he won't bring me down. I will not be the weak one!" she challenged herself. They unwrapped themselves and stood. She straightened her shoulders and wiped her face with a handkerchief he held out. "I've already set us several hours behind schedule. I'll return to the lab and finish the next stage of the potion tonight, so it will be ready for testing in 3 days. Are there any other potions that you or Madam Pomfrey needs stocked? I do believe I will now have the time since I won't need weekends off for that weasel."

"We can discuss that in the morning. I've already completed the last portion of the potion, and it is 2 hours into the 72 hour simmering phase. Go back to your chambers and take care of yourself tonight. Work can wait." He took several steps back and put on what she referred to as his 'classroom voice'. "Now I expect you to be on time as usual, Miss Granger. I will not allow this to influence your apprenticeship in any manner. I accepted your application because of who you are, not who your friends are. Just because Mr. Weasley has finally come to his senses and realised he is not appropriate for a person of your calibre is no reason to allow you to slack off or shirk your duties."

"Yes, Professor. This will not affect the quality of my work. I apologise for putting you in such an uncomfortable position this evening," she spoke sharply with her head up.

"See that it doesn't happen again." He nodded and quickly turned to disappear into the shadows. Taking another deep breath, she turned and walked quickly back to her own quarters.

Hermione Granger spent the next six months reliving a lesson she should have remembered from her first year at Hogwarts: Professor Snape is rarely wrong. And, unfortunately, he was not wrong about her friends. Ron fed them a story about what happened, Ginny stood behind her brother, and Harry stood with his surrogate family. Hermione was turned into the villain of the relationship, and her friends were unwilling to listen to anything Hermione said, had she been inclined to speak. Not willing to give up the last bit of her pride, she never spoke of what happened that night again.

The last two years of her apprenticeship with Professor Snape were filled with experiments, research, and many theoretical discussions. It seemed that Hermione's loss of friendship with her former best friends was a blessing to the surly professor. No longer worried that he would have to suffer the presence of Potter or Weasley should they decide to surprise Hermione with a visit, he was able to relax enough to form a solid working partnership with Hermione. They worked well together, Hermione's insatiable thirst for knowledge complementing Professor Snape's innate ability to leap from one theory to another. Professor Snape would connect the missing links in Hermione's research, and Hermione would provide the research and evidence for the theories he created. By the end of the apprenticeship, the formality had all but faded between the two. Severus gave Hermione an excellent recommendation for her Masters accreditation, and before she had time to plan for her career after the apprenticeship ended in June, she was approached by the Department of Mysteries. Accepting the position offered, she gave the cover story supplied by the Department to Severus and allowed him to believe she was accepting a position at the Ministry's Department of Research & Development. She was forced to listen to him complain for weeks about her wasting her abilities by working for dunderheaded bureaucrats, but understood that her friend and colleague thought she could do better.

The first year of her new position was spent in training, a training that Hermione wished she could have received before the end of the war against Voldemort. Her second year was spent going through old projects to see if her fresh insight could give the project new life. During this time, she received permission to discuss general ideas with Severus and quickly began writing him and asking his opinion. Soon the Department realised what value Severus Snape held, and at the recommendation of their lead researcher, Severus was offered a chance to become a consultant. He kept his position at Hogwarts, but the Department provided him funding and a better private lab to conduct their experiments. He didn't have any interaction with the Department itself, other than by enchanted journal to the lead researcher who recommended him.

Reaching a block in his experimentation, Severus requested an assistant from the Department. The new assistant would help him with both his teaching responsibilities and his research duties for the Department. It took him quite by surprise to discover that the lead researcher he corresponded with through the Department was his new assistant, none other than Hermione Granger.

Two

Chapter 2 of 3

Hermione's return and departure from Hogwarts, with a glimpse into the friendship between Hermione and Severus.

"I should have known it would be you. No one else could be so absorbed with accepting written word as law and being as unwilling to step outside the book and think for herself as you!" Severus would never admit that he was happy to see her, that he was glad she was working with him again.

"I do believe you are just upset that I am your superior within the Department, Severus," she teased as she squeezed his hand. "And yes, it is quite lovely to see you again as well. The last two years away from Hogwarts have done me well, thank you very much for asking. And yes, I am quite proud of my accomplishments."

"Do remember that we are at Hogwarts now. You are MY assistant here, regardless of what you do at the Department."

"Yes, yes, quite right. I am simply here to assist you in your research. The Department would be most interested in your complete success in this project. The current results show much promise and can currently protect against 22% of Imperius curses and reduce the effects of the Cruciatius by 17%. If we can find some way of boosting these results, we will be able to save many lives. Of course, should you find the formula that does this, the Department will allow you the right to claim credit and publish the modified reports."

"That is acceptable."

After a long pause where both Severus and Hermione stood there waiting for the other to say something, they both tried speaking at the same time. Hermione motioned for Severus to continue.

"I was just going to ask how you've been. Your letters the last few months have been all work. How are your parents?"

"Oh, quite well, thanks. My mum says hello and wanted me to tell you she will be sending some fresh biscuits to you in a few days to thank you for the Pepper Up potion you sent her. Thank you again for doing that. I was so busy taking care of the arrangements to leave London I didn't have a chance to get any brewing done, and her schedule was so full there was no way she could take time off to deal with that cold."

"Not a problem. I was making Madam Pomfrey a batch for the Infirmary at the time, so it was rather easy to take a few doses out for her."

"Right, well, thanks. It saved me loads of time. Roger was being a complete ninny about me leaving London. Like we can't just Apparate to each other within a few minutes. I still think he did something to my boxes. Every time I had the last box packed, I would find the first box had unpacked itself."

"You are still seeing that idiot? I thought you would have gotten over your obsession with Quidditch players."

"I do believe you are one to talk. Have I not seen you in the papers escorting none other than Gwenog Jones?"

"Ms. Jones and I are merely friends, as if it were any of your business," he sniffed.

"Ah, but of course. And to answer your question, yes, I am still seeing Roger. I think."

"You think? How can you only think and not be sure?"

"Like I said, he was being a complete ninny. He may be taking my last comment a bit seriously at the moment."

"And what was your last comment to him?"

"Oh, I am not sure exactly. Something about rearranging the location of his testicles if he interfered with my packing one more time. I can't say that I have seen or heard from him in the week since then."

"You only threatened him with a hex? He should be glad he got away with just that. I seem to recall Mr. Malfoy whinging incessantly about your right hook. Wipe that grin off your face, Miss Granger. Gryffindors shouldn't smirk so."

"I was just remembering the feeling of the Ferret's perfect little nose breaking. Have I ever told you that is one of my top three favourite moments in life?"

"Yes, I do recall that list. Quite a Slytherin list, you know. Breaking a nose, killing a Dark Lord, and discovering you make more money than Ronald Weasley, former Professional Quidditch player, current Auror-in-Training, and ex-fiancé."

"Oh, I have a new favourite, to replace the last."

"Do you now? I'd love to hear the updated list."

"Discovering that as Head Researcher, Department of Mysteries, I have in my power the right to commandeer any Ministry employee for experimentation, with proper Obliviation to follow if necessary. And I see your eyes lighting up at that. It is quite a marvellous privilege, don't you agree? Any Ministry employee..."

"How wondrous that Mr. Weasley is now a Ministry employee, don't you agree?"

"Oh, quite. I must say it does amazing things to one's constitution to know that should someone annoy me, I can ensure that they will never do so again. I do believe I quite understand what you Slytherins enjoy so much about power. It is a beautiful feeling to be in charge."

"Say no more. My life's work is complete. I have finally and quite thoroughly corrupted the Gryffindor Princess, the innocent third of the Golden Trio, and I may now die with a smirk on my face."

"Don't be silly. We must first find some way of rubbing it in Ron's and Harry's faces. Then you may die with a smirk on your face."

"Ah, just so."

"And you must wait until the very moment after we complete this project. That way you can do all the work, and I can get all the credit."

"Of course. It is only fitting that I turn all my hard work over to you. Tell me, do you plan on finding some way of getting me to leave all of my possessions to you as well?"

"I have plenty of time to manoeuvre that, I believe. Perhaps if I am lucky I will find a way to get someone fabulously wealthy to leave all their money to you first. I'd hate to be stuck with just debts from your estate."

"Well, I shall try to be accommodating to your machinations. Please give me notice of the exact moment you wish me to die so I can carry my Remembrall with me. I'd hate to be late."

"But of course. I'd be happy to give you advance notice. I wouldn't want good ol' Gwenog stuck without a date to the next charity auction."

"How truly kind of you. Shall I call you the Dark Lady now?"

"I do so doubt I will be dark. Besides, I look terrible in black. Perhaps I should honour my Weasley past and go with Scarlet?"

"The Scarlet Lady? Are you sure you wish to be known as such?"

"I'm already known as such, so I might as well make it official."

"That is quite true."

Another long pause in the conversation, but this time it was far from the uncomfortable silence of before. Hermione looked to Severus and smiled. "I am glad I came back. I work better when I can discuss my ideas with you. Besides, Roger never understood my humour. It is nice being able to talk without worrying whether I am offending someone."

"I can understand the appeal. I will admit that you have not been the annoying know-it-all since you parted with Weasley. It has been nice to have a... friend... that understands my own comments."

"Severus Snape, did you just call me a friend?"

"I suppose I did. Admit this to anyone and I know 493 different untraceable ways of poisoning you."

"493? You only taught me 492!"

"Well I had to keep one to myself just in case."

The two continued to work together closely the next three years. They had many breakthroughs in their research, and even more failures. Their arguments become legendary in Hogwarts. After a particularly vicious debate, several students within hearing distance had to be sent to the Infirmary for a calming draught. Madam Pomfrey was at a loss when the students refused to take it, mentioning something about poison in Professor Snape's potions. The Headmistress spent several days trying to figure out how to protect her students from the severe arguments before asking for assistance. The Department of Mysteries quietly stepped in and cast heavy Silencing spells in the work areas so that the arguments were no longer public.

And so it was that one day, the final breakthrough was made. As the two stared at the successful potion, neither knew whether to be happy for the success or sad that the work had ended. They spent a few weeks putting the final touches on the potion. During that time, Hermione was contacted by a private company to lead research and development. Surprised at the offer, she met with the company representative. After a pleasant lunch and long walk through Hogsmeade with Blaise Zabini, Chief Operating Officer at Malfoy Enterprises, Ltd., Hermione was very tempted to accept the position. She was flattered at Blaise's request for a date and accepted.

Six months later Hermione was President of Research & Development at Malfoy Enterprises. She had met with Draco Malfoy once before accepting the position and was surprised to discover that it was Severus who had recommended her to Malfoy. Since that time she had continued her correspondence with Severus, who had left Hogwarts and taken over her former position as Head Researcher at the Department of Mysteries, and saw him twice a month at the 'Malfoy Family Dinner'. Draco was the last living Malfoy and chose to surround himself with positive friends. He and Severus were close, and Draco always encouraged Blaise to bring Hermione to the dinners. A steady friendship began between Hermione and Draco, who was trying very hard to live a clean life.

It was during one dinner that Hermione was greeted by Ginny Weasley. Having finally given up on Harry, Ginny began dating Draco, and the two were very happy together. An engagement announcement was expected shortly, and although Hermione was pleased that her new friend Draco was happy, she was not as pleased with his choice. After several uncomfortable dinners, Ginny asked to speak privately with Hermione and attempted to explain why she broke her friendship with Hermione. Many apologies later, Ginny finally asked for a second chance at the friendship. Apparently the Weasleys were not as quick to forgive Draco as Ginny was and still expected her to sit around and wait for Harry to marry her. When they discovered Ginny was involved with Malfoy, the family was not happy. Ginny had little contact with her family and began to understand just what they had done to Hermione those many years before.

After more than eighteen months together, Blaise proposed to Hermione. She happily accepted, and the family dinner planned for that weekend quickly turned into an engagement party. The next six months were spent not just planning their own wedding, but attending Draco and Ginny's wedding and the festivities before. The Weasleys were slowly accepting Draco once they saw how happy the couple was. Hermione had, with approval from Ginny, avoided the showers and parties that Ron was present for, but was unable to avoid Molly. After several rude comments from the Weasley family matron, Hermione finally let loose and told Molly exactly why she had broken up with Ron. When Molly confronted Ron with the story later, she realised that Hermione was telling the truth and quickly apologised to Hermione. Draco and Ginny's wedding went perfectly, and Blaise and Hermione prayed that theirs would go as smoothly.

A/N: This story is complete in three chapters. I am trying a different style of writing so please bear with me. Any ConCrit is very welcome. I fear Severus and Hermione are slightly OOC in this chapter when viewed from the current books. I've made assumptions based on my own (ofttimes negative) perceptions of characters and interpersonal relationships. Hopefully you see potential in a friendship between Severus and Hermione. I think that the two of them together would have some extremely humorous conversations. Thank you!

Three

Conclusion to the story.

He was sitting quietly in front of his fire, sipping his brandy and enjoying the sound of the rainstorm outside. It took him several moments to realise that pounding was not thunder but someone knocking at the door.

"Hermione? Why are you outside? You look like a drowned rat!"

"C-can I come in please, Severus?"

"Of course. Why didn't you cast an Impervious Charm on yourself?"

"I don't know. I just... I just didn't think of it."

"You didn't think of it? Why not? Hermione, you are starting to worry me. Let me dry you with a spell and sit you down. What's wrong?"

"Bl-Blaise called it off."

"Called what off?"

"The wedding, Severus! He called off the wedding."

"He did WHAT? The wedding is in six weeks! Why on earth would he do that?"

"I don't know. He said so many things. I can't think right now. I don't understand. He said I was blind if I didn't see it myself."

"See what yourself?"

"I don't know! I don't understand."

"Why don't you start at the beginning? Here, take a long sip of this, and you will feel warm in no time. A sip! Not a... well. You threw that back like a champion."

"Better. Much better."

"Now what happened?"

"I was at home looking through our research on the Wolfsbane Potion modifications. I'd just received your letter and wanted to go over some of the sticking points before Blaise and I met for dinner. I guess I got distracted because the next thing I knew Blaise was at the door asking why I never showed up. I realised I was two hours late and apologised. I starting explaining some of modifications you suggested, and he just... he just... just sat down on the couch and sighed."

"He sighed? What for?"

"He asked if he was ever going to come first. I assumed he meant to my research, and I explained to him that of course he was first. I was just on a tear because I think we are on the verge of a major breakthrough."

"But he knows this. He has been there for other breakthroughs. Why is this bothering him now?"

It was another one of the rare uncomfortable silences between them.

"Hermione, if you don't wish to discuss this, we don't have to."

"N-no. We need to talk about this. He said... he said it wasn't the research he felt second to. It was you."

"Me? Why would he feel second to me?"

"I don't know! He started talking about how even when he came to offer me the job, I wanted to speak to you first. How when he and I began dating, I always spoke with you before agreeing to the next date. I told him I wasn't looking for approval from you to go on the date. I was just looking for confirmation of the time, but he just kept talking. He said that I was always quick to look for you at family dinners, that you were the first one I looked for. And when we announced our engagement, he said I was looking straight at you."

"And... did... I mean, were you... doing this?"

"Yes. But I didn't realise it then. I didn't realise it until Blaise said it. *was* looking to you, wanting to see your face. Were you really happy that I was going to marry Blaise? Did you think it was a good idea? I wanted to know your reaction."

"But why would my reaction matter? Blaise is the one you are happy with. I am your research partner. Why does my opinion count so much?"

"I don't know! I thought it was because you are my friend. I care what all my friends think."

"What does Blaise think?"

"He thinks... he thinks no matter what everyone else says, you always do what I suggest, what I think you should do. He thinks that you care for me as more than a research partner, more than a friend."

"Why does he think that?"

"Because he says you look at me the same way I look at you. The way Draco and Ginny look at each other."

Another uncomfortable silence crept in. Taking a small sip, Hermione watched Severus.

"Do you? Do you look at me the way Draco looks at Ginny?"

"I... I don't know. I mean, I never paid particular attention to how they look at each other, so I couldn't compare."

"Severus... is Blaise right? Do you care for me?"

"Of course I care for you, Hermione. You are my friend, and I have few enough people that I can call friend to disregard you so easily."

"Severus! Don't do this. Not now. Please!"

"What do you want me to do? What do you want me to say? I will tell you whatever you want to hear, Hermione, but I don't know what that is!"

"I just want the truth. Am I your friend? Does Blaise have this wrong? Or do you care for me as more than a friend?"

"Of course I do! Do you really want to hear this though? Do you? Does it make you feel better knowing that I pine for you even when you are right here with me? Every time I see you laugh and smile with Blaise, it tears me up. I want to be one to make you happy. I want to be the one you smile for! But I am not. I can't be that person. So I let you be happy with him. I keep it to myself because I want you to be happy even if it isn't with me. He doesn't deserve you, Hermione. None of them did, nor do I. You can't just settle for someone; you have to find that one person that keeps challenging you to be a better person. You loved them all so well that they couldn't grow anymore. It was easier for them to sit back and let you have your way. But it stifles you, doesn't it? You end up holding back."

"Because they weren't you! I had to hold back because the only part left was the part you had. I've spent years wishing I could be the person to make you happy. I saw you with your dates and your lovers, and I had to stand there and smile through it all. I hoped that you would find that one person. You had your type of woman and I wasn't her. I saw that right away, so I never told you how I felt. When I moved to Hogwarts to work with you, I broke it off with Roger. I thought that maybe you would start to see me as more than your student. But there was nothing there. You never saw me as more than a friend, more than a colleague. It hurt so badly. As much as I wanted to be there, I knew I couldn't bear to see you day after day without giving myself away. I had to take that job or I would have embarrassed myself. I watched you to see if it made any difference to you, and I saw nothing. It didn't matter to you that I was leaving."

"Hermione, it mattered more than you could know. How could I act any different? I am twenty years older than you; I was your teacher, for Merlin's sake!"

"And then I was your boss for the Department! Things change, Severus. I grew up! Do you still only see me as a student?"

"Of course I don't!"

"Then why are you yelling at me?"

"Because you are yelling at me!"

"Then what are we fighting about?"

"I don't know anymore! Hermione... please. I promised I would not interfere in your relationships. If you love Blaise, go work it out with him."

"I may care for Blaise, but I could never love him the way I love you, Severus. If you want me to go, that is your decision. But don't push me away out of some misguided sense of fair play. I have told you how I feel, but I cannot do this again. If I walk out now, I am not coming back. If you do not want me, I will walk away."

"I will always want you, Hermione. But more than that, I want what is best for you. I want you to stay here, but I don't know that I can make you happy. I can love you with my whole heart, but I don't know that it will be enough."

"Severus, it will always be more than enough for me. I love you just as much as you say you love me. Don't push me away now. Don't waste more time. If we had both had the courage, we could have done this years ago. Don't let this pass!"

"Are you sure this is what you want? I couldn't let you go again, Hermione. If you are staying, it has to be forever."

"Of course it is forever. I won't let you go now that I have you. You are the one I have been looking for; I just couldn't let myself hope that you wanted me the same way."

"I don't want to waste any more time. Stay with me, Hermione. Be here with me."

"Always, Severus. Always."

A/N: I am not so happy with this ending. My stories always end up as fluff. *sigh* Maybe one day I can figure out how to keep that from happening. Thank you all for sticking with me these brief chapters. Let me know what you think.