

The One I'm Waiting For

by GeminiScorp

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Prologue

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Just borrowing the HP characters. Thank you JKR for letting me play.

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Hermione felt a pang of nostalgia as she watched her youngest, Hugo, and his best friend, Lily Potter, scramble up the steps of the Hogwarts Express. They had snuck back out for one last hug, and now the conductor's shrill whistle had them running back to the train without so much as a backwards glance.

The engine slowly chugged out of the station, and Hermione turned to look at her husband and friends. Her sister-in-law was snugly under Harry's protective arm. She smiled wistfully as she watched him whisper in Ginny's ear, making her laugh at whatever silly thing he was saying.

Ron, misinterpreting her expression, reached over and draped a heavy arm around her shoulders.

"It'll be okay, 'Mione," he said, squeezing her arm a little too tightly.

"Hermione, can you believe it?" Ginny asked with a tearful laugh. "Our babies are growing up. What are we going to do without those two around to drive us crazy?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm sure I'll enjoy the quiet. Hugo has been bouncing off the walls for the last week. I thought he was going to burst from the anticipation."

"Rose threatened to turn him into a toad if he didn't calm down. She's a Weasley through and through," Ron added with a laugh.

"Lily did the same, but her brothers just ignored her," Harry said. "She must have asked us a million questions. Which of course she already knew most of the answers to."

Hermione laughed. "How many times has she read *Hogwarts: A History*?"

"Not nearly as many times as you, but give her a few more years and she'll catch up," Harry teased. "Well, we'd love to stay and chat, but I've made reservations at that new Italian place in Diagon Alley. I promised Ginny a celebration lunch just the two of us," he finished with a wink at his wife.

After a quick goodbye and promises to get together soon, the Potters Disapparated with a loud crack, leaving Ron and Hermione alone on the now nearly deserted train platform.

"That sounds good, 'Mione. A nice relaxing lunch we could go to that Indian place you're always talking about and then let's go home and enjoy the quiet." He flashed her his most charming smile and raised a ginger eyebrow in invitation.

"Sorry, Ron, but I have to get back to work. My newest experimental potion is at a critical stage," she replied as she turned away from him, her thoughts already in the lab. "I've probably left it under a stasis charm for far too long already."

"Hermione, don't you ever think of anything other than work?" he called to her retreating figure. "Come on, the kids are gone. We finally have a chance to be alone, and all you can think of is your lousy potions."

"Lousy potions?" she mumbled and turned to face him. "Well, Ronald, last time I checked, it was *my lousy potions* that paid most of our bills. We've gone over all of this before. You have to stop expecting me to change. I can't help who I am any more than you can."

"What's that supposed to mean?" he said, closing the distance between them. He leaned forward, putting his face close to hers and in a loud, angry whisper continued, "Oh, no, not this fight again, Hermione. What would you like me to be? Smarter. More ambitious. Should I spend my every waking minute wrapped up in my work? Would you like me better then? Would you?"

"Oh, please, Ron. You're right, we won't have this fight again. It's old. It's worn out. Honestly, I don't know what you're so upset about; I'm usually at work now anyway. I'll be home later," she said, taking two steps back and turning around.

"What time, Hermione? When I'm already asleep? Now that Rose and Hugo are both at Hogwarts, I'll never see you. Every waking minute will be spent at that damn lab. Merlin, I'm just so sick of this!" With one last disgusted sigh, he Disapparated.

Hermione whirled around and gaped at where he had disappeared. It was true, it had been ages since they had spent any quality time together, but her job was demanding. She had been developing vaccines for some of the more deadly wizarding diseases. Because of her and her research team, Dragon Pox was almost completely eradicated. He used to understand her dedication, even encouraged it, but now all he seemed to do was pout and complain.

Hermione stood lost in her thoughts for a few moments more. The train platform had emptied except for a distinguished-looking, elderly gentleman sitting on one of the numerous red benches. He was openly staring at her with a faint look of amusement. She smiled weakly and grunted out an apology for the scene he had just witnessed.

"Not to worry, my dear," he said, beckoning for her to sit next to him. "Nothing to be embarrassed about. Everyone has their differences. I'm sure you will work them out eventually."

Something about the man's manner made Hermione feel immediately comfortable, and to her shock, she sat down next to him. After a moment she said, "I'm really not sure we can work this out. We're such different people. I love him, I have since school, but we really have nothing in common anymore."

"Ah, so, a childhood sweetheart then? Have you been married long?" he asked with a slight smile on his worn out face.

"Seventeen years. But I've known him since I was eleven. We were best friends at school and somehow it progressed into more. It felt like the right thing to do, getting married. Now I just don't know anymore."

The man said nothing, just waited patiently for Hermione to continue. His eyes were a soft grey-blue, but they held such intensity and passion under the surface that Hermione was mesmerized. It was puzzling; this man seemed familiar to her, and yet she was sure they had never met.

He finally raised an eyebrow at her, a small grin playing at the corners of his mouth. "So, I take it you've immersed yourself in work to escape your marriage then?"

"No... not exactly." But perhaps she had. This stranger had been able to see the truth so quickly, why hadn't she? "I'm contracted by the Ministry and St. Mungo's as a Potions mistress. They have me researching and creating vaccines for wizarding diseases.

"It does take up a lot of my time, but I'm home most days by seven," she added a bit defensively.

"Most days?" he questioned. He didn't give her time to answer his question with lies. "I once had a profession that I was a virtual slave to. I gave up my life to accomplish my tasks. Now I sincerely regret not doing the things that would have made me happy. Yes, your job is important but it *will* wait for you, whilst your life does not.

"Now, humor an old man and tell me what has you so anxious to get back to work." His eyes sparkled with interest.

Hermione checked her watch and decided that the potion could wait a few minutes more. It had been so long since anyone had asked her about her work with any true interest, she couldn't resist telling this man about her difficulties with the latest vaccine.

They spent the next half hour deep in conversation, the elderly gentleman asking intelligent questions and understanding the technical terms she used. He even added to the conversation with observations that had eluded Hermione. She hadn't felt this invigorated and alive conversing with someone since she had been an apprentice debating with her master.

"The time is getting late, and I must be going now, Ms...?"

"Hermione. Hermione Granger-Weasley. But please, call me Hermione."

"It has been my pleasure, Hermione. You have made an old man feel alive again." He pulled an elegant silver pocket watch from his trousers and clicked it open. A sleek dragon etched into the front of the timepiece gazed at her with emerald eyes. "I really must be going, my dear, but thank you for such an invigorating conversation." He stood gracefully, slipping the watch into his pocket, and bowed to her.

With a swish of his robes that seemed faintly familiar to Hermione, he strode away.

"Sir, wait... your name?" she called, rising from the bench and taking a step towards him, as if to follow.

Turning and bowing slightly in her direction, he introduced himself. "Tomas Pointer, at your service, m'lady. It has been a pleasure speaking to you, Hermione. I sincerely hope we have the chance to meet again."

He smiled at her fondly and Disapparated, leaving her alone on the empty platform.

"As do I, Tomas," she whispered after him. "As do I."

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Author's notes:

This story was originally written for the wonderful deemichelle during the winter round of the SS/HG exchange on livejournal. I've cleaned it up some and am posting an edited version here.

I would never have completed this fic without the help of lux_astraea and Sbrande who held my hand and made me finish. Thank you also to Odd Doll for the original beta.

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