

She'd thought that there was something there; she had hoped for it desperately. But he was always on guard around her, never letting her truly know him as a lover should. She'd started falling in love with him a few months after breaking up with Viktor, and when he'd kissed her, she'd fully realised her feelings. After that, she believed that he could come to love her despite the fact that he'd continued to withdraw from her. She believed that he would eventually let her in and that they would discover that he too shared that feeling she craved. However, people rarely changed, and her desires were nothing but dreams.

"What are you talking about, Hermione? What am I supposed to see?" He was starting to feel uneasy. If he was right, he knew exactly what she was talking about, and he had to admit that it scared him.

Her eyes widened at his questions. He even had the nerve to ask it, the bastard. She had been pretty obvious about her feelings for him, trying to get closer to him, trying to treat him tenderly. Gods, she had even flirted with him a few times. Severus was an intelligent man; he should have noticed, and if he was asking her these questions, it was clear that he was feigning ignorance in an attempt to not hurt her feelings.

"It really doesn't matter at all. I have spoken with the Headmaster to let him know my thoughts about this, and he understands my reasons. He is considering hiring a foreign Potions master, so you don't have to worry about the Defence post. You'll get it anyway."

Severus was speechless. She had even spoken with Dumbledore before telling him about her decision to make sure that nothing could stop her from leaving Hogwarts, from leaving him. He would certainly hex the bloody man for accepting her plan.

He was sitting there, looking at her with his cold gaze and not saying a word. In her mind, that could only mean that it was over, that he had nothing to say or didn't object. Hermione took advantage of his silence to say her farewell. "I can never thank you enough for the opportunity you gave me and for everything you have taught me during all these years. I would have loved to teach here, but I just can't stay, not like this." She walked to the door before addressing him again, not daring to face him, knowing that if she looked into his eyes all her resolve would waver. "I still have packing to do, so I'm leaving now. I'm not sure if I'll see you tomorrow. That's why I wanted to say goodbye right now. Take care of yourself, Severus."

She had wanted to say more, wanted to tell him that she loved him like she had never loved anyone before, but her tears were threatening to spill. She didn't want to break down in front of him. When she reached the door, knowing that it was over, something happened. She barely heard it, but it wasn't her imagination. There was a barely audible whisper from the man she loved.

"Hermione, please, don't leave me. Stay."

Hermione turned to face him, no longer battling with the tears in her eyes and letting them run down her cheeks freely. She struggled to find her voice and asked him, hoarse with emotion, "Why?"

He didn't answer her. What could he tell her? That he loved her? He didn't even know if he did. He grimly watched her while trying to find the right words.

"Severus, give me a reason to stay."

Silence. He remained there paralysed, not knowing what to do. He wasn't prepared for this, never having to confess his feelings before.

"Damn it! Talk to me. Open yourself to me."

"I cannot. I don't know how to do it, how to cope with it." He rose from his chair behind the desk and walked around to stand in front of her, his emotions threatening to unleash. "Do you know how much it scares me to be unable to recognise myself? To know that my fate lies in your hands and that I am at your mercy? Do you know how overwhelming it is?" He turned to walk away from her, realising that he had lost all control and said too much.

She looked at him incredulously. She never expected that reaction from him, and it was too much. He might feel the same for her, and he was fighting it because he couldn't bear her rejection. She had to do something, and the best course of action was to be completely honest.

"I know how you feel." He turned to face her in disbelief. "I know it because I feel the same for you. It's supposed to be that way, overwhelming." She walked to him hesitantly. "Severus, you'll never know love unless you surrender to it."

"I cannot open myself to something I do not know."

"Just tell me; tell me how you feel."

He turned away from her again, trying to hide. She came to stand beside him and placed her hand carefully on his arm. He reluctantly turned to face her and barely suppressed a gasp. She looked so vulnerable and so open that he could see her feelings plainly on her face. Their eyes locked; her brown ones bright with emotion and unshed tears, his black eyes dark and full of passion. When she whispered with a choked voice, "Severus, please," that was his undoing. He embraced her, knowing it was right and that there was nowhere else he wanted to be or anyone else he wanted to be with.

"I cannot do that. I cannot open for you and let you see who I am. You will loathe me, loathe the man I was and the terrible things I have done in my past. I was one of the Dark Lord's favourites. He asked me to do so many things, and I had to do them to avoid raising suspicions. You deserve better than me." He stepped back and eyed her. In that instant, he felt something snap. Why deny what he felt? He held her close again, talking softly into her hair, "I know you should have someone better, but selfish as I am right now, I do not care. I want you. Every time I look into your eyes, the horrors of my past diminish. If I'd allow it, you could bring out the best in me even though no one, including myself, believes there is still something good left."

"I could never loathe you. I'm not fool. I know what you have done in your past, but I can't put all the blame on you. You did what you had to do." She pulled herself from his embrace to look directly into his eyes and placed a finger on his lips to prevent him from answering. "Don't try to push me away, not again." With that, she removed her finger and raised her head, brushing his lips with hers in a tender kiss. She pulled back only to look into his eyes again, trying to convey how she felt. "I love you, Severus, the good and the bad."

It was enough for him; the last little thread of control he held broke instantly. He knew she was honest, and he decided to not allow the worry of his dark past to force him to push her away. He tightened his embrace and pulled her closer before starting to kiss her deeply, desperately. Something was set free inside him, and he gave himself willingly to his emotions and his desires. He wanted her more than anything he'd ever wanted in his life. His hands started moving; one moved through her brown hair while the other moved along her side and through her robes until it rested on her waist. Her hands were also exploring his body, one tracing the contours of his face while the other slid over his chest.

She pulled back again and looked at him, breathless from their passionate kiss. Without thinking, just feeling, she said, "I want you. I need you."

Without waiting for further invitation, he lifted her into his arms and kissed her again while carrying her to his chambers. He entered and deposited her on the edge of his bed and sat beside her. Before resuming their kissing, he confessed to her, "I have wanted this, dreamed about this for so long."

"I have wanted this also. You can't imagine how much." And with that admission, she pulled him down with her as they kissed, lying against the mattress of his bed. A part of her wanted this more than anything, but another part wondered if it was too soon. After all, she had *just* admitted her feelings aloud for the first time, and he had kind of admitted the same, though he hadn't repeated the words. In the end, the only thing that mattered was that this felt right to her, that she belonged to him, and that there was no better place for her than his arms.

He gently caressed her body, knowing what he wanted, knowing that this was no illusion and that she was there with him. What amazed him most was the woman in his arms. She was actually giving herself willingly to him after confessing that she loved him. He slowly started undoing the clasps of her robes, exposing her shirt beneath. He moved his hands to slowly caress her breasts through the fabric while she fumbled with his countless buttons.

She broke the kiss to whisper in a husky and slightly annoyed voice, "Honestly, am I a witch or what?" With that stated, she grabbed her wand from the robes beneath her, and with a whispered spell, his robe disappeared revealing a white linen shirt. He couldn't help but to laugh at her remark, finding it amusing the way she'd admonished herself. "Much better," she mumbled, smiling at him briefly before resuming her kissing and attacking the buttons of his shirt.

They worked with the buttons of their respective clothing until both shirts were completely open. Deftly, he unfastened her bra, caressing her breasts again, and this time it was skin against skin. They didn't break their kiss until it was necessary for them to breathe. He looked into her eyes, pinning her with the intensity of his gaze, and caressed her face while moving a strand of hair from her face. "Are you sure about this, Hermione? If we continue, I will not let you go away from me...ever."

"And people say I talk too much." She laughed at his startled expression and answered his question. "Yes, Severus, I'm sure about this. I have never been surer about anything in my life. And know this: I'm not planning to go anywhere or letting you go by any means."

It was all he needed to know before he started kissing her again, this time more urgently and nearly ripping her skirt in an attempt to get it off. She helped him by unzipping her skirt and raising her hips, letting him slip down to where he pulled it from her legs and tossed it to the floor. She did a better job opening his trousers, and with a little help from him, they were quickly wearing only their lower underwear. He spread her legs slightly while settling between her thighs and kissed his way down from her mouth to her neck and to her breasts. He continued kissing, laving, and sucking her nipples while she buried her hands in his hair and arched her body to rub it against his. His hands moved down, tracing the soft skin of her abdomen, the contour of her belly button, and her knickers. She was so beautiful and so perfect, and it wasn't only because of her body, it was that courage and intelligence she possessed that made her completely delectable. She had an air of confidence that made her completely irresistible to him.

If Hermione thought she had felt strong and overwhelming emotions before, nothing could be compared to what she felt in his arms with his body pressed against hers. She wanted to give him everything: her body, her mind, and her feelings. Even after that, it would not be enough. His tongue kissing her breasts, his fingers teasing her entrance...it was too much for her. She pulled him up for a kiss just after he removed her knickers. Between kisses and with a breathy voice, she told him what she wanted. "I need you now."

Severus thought there was nothing more enticing than her voice full of passion, her eyes dark with desire, and her love reflecting in her expression. "You are so beautiful." He moved to comply with her desires and removed his boxers before positioning himself to enter her. Her legs wrapped around his waist, and when he was fully sheathed inside her, they looked at each other for a long moment. In silent agreement, they began moving rhythmically in a perfect synchrony that made it seem as though they had done it forever and that they were meant for each other. They caressed each other, not daring to break their gaze, his hand squeezing her breasts, teasing her nipples as he thrust into her. He started slowly while their bodies moulded together, but with every passing moment, he quickened his pace, deepening his penetration, wanting to fill her and make her feel complete.

She clung to his back, tracing its muscles while she moved her hips upward to meet his thrusts. When the emotions and the sensations he elicited from her were too much, she laid her head against his pillow, moaning incoherently, feeling her building orgasm. He moved down to kiss her neck, her shoulder, and her collarbone while feeling the same tension building in his own body. When her body started convulsing and tightening with pleasure, she came and called his name. He kissed her lips, still pounding into her, knowing that he would follow her soon. After some frantic strokes, he also came, collapsing over her, holding her tightly, and never wanting to let her go.

Their lovemaking was so intense that sleep rapidly claimed both. He watched her through tired eyes, taking in her beautiful sleeping face, the peaceful rise and fall of her chest while breathing, and realised in that instant that he finally knew what love was.

Lorraine's Notes: It could seem that Hermione was giving up or that it was a trick to force him into taking the next step. She's not that cunning, and I don't consider her as someone who would give ultimatums. But I also don't see her as a passive woman who is willing to wait unconditionally for what she wants. She was fighting for him and trying, but after seeing no response, she just decided to stop hurting herself.

I really wanted to hex Snape until he got some good sense and realised what he was doing. He was so bloody stubborn and gave me a hard time, but at the end he did the right thing.

I want to thank Southern Witch, who did a great job beta reading this chapter.

Southern's Notes: It's about time he gets his head out of his arse, eh? Hehe.

Step Five. Give him his dreams back and fulfil them with him

Chapter 5 of 5

Making Severus happy is simpler than anyone expects. Hermione achieves it in ten steps, but no one can say they were easy.

Step Five. Give him his dreams back and fulfil them with him

Disclaimer: All characters and concepts of Harry Potter's universe belong to J.K. Rowling; I just borrowed them for a little while.

Harry Potter was laughing so hard that every witch and wizard near their table, and those who weren't, were staring at them. They didn't need such an outburst to be noticed; the Golden Trio still dragged attention to themselves just for being there.

"You're kidding, right? Hermione, that was a nice try, even for you, but you have never been good with jokes. Who do you expect to believe that you're in a relationship with Snape?"

Ginny looked nervously between her fiancé and her best friend. Harry was still laughing like mad, and Hermione looked as if she would hex him until he learned to keep his mouth shut. If she didn't do something, things would end in a nasty way.

"Eh, Harry, darling, maybe you should stop laughing, and listen to Hermione."

"Come on, Ginny. You can't tell me you believe this nonsense, unless... Oh, I can see it now; you're also part of the joke. It's a really bad one, love. You two should have asked Fred and George for some ideas."

