

The Ministry Ball

by debjunk

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Disclaimer: The usual... not my characters, just my fantasy.

Thank you, Lilith Kayden, for your diligent work in looking this over. Also, this story wouldn't exist without your thinking that one of my other characters in another fic was a glamoured Hermione. That set me to thinking, which can be dangerous. This one's for you.

The Ministry Ball

Severus Snape made his way to the Great Hall. He would do it today. He had been trying to do it for days now, but each time he got the nerve, something would come up. She would ask him a question and distract him, she would be called away, or he would just lose the nerve before he had a chance to open his mouth. But he wouldn't do that today. Today, he would ask her. He would ask Hermione Granger to be his date for the Ministry Ball.

The Fifth Annual Ministry Ball to Celebrate the Defeat of You-Know-Whowas set for that very night. He knew she had been invited. They had all been invited. Every single war hero was expected to attend, and there would be big trouble with the Ministry if they didn't. He hated the stupid affair. It was just an opportunity for people who had never fought nor had known anything about the war to spout off in great diatribes about how wonderful the war heroes were and the great things they had accomplished. There would be speeches and then a night filled with dancing. Severus always went and stood on the sidelines, of course. He did not dance... at least... not in public.

He was actually a very good dancer. His mother had taught him during the summers of his teenage years. She had told him he needed to know how to dance so he could impress the ladies. He had frowned at her. He knew, even then, that no ladies would ever be impressed with him, whether he could waltz or not. But she had insisted, and he had learned. He had actually used his skills some as a young man, asking girls to dance during certain annoying functions created by Albus Dumbledore. But he had never really enjoyed it. He had never asked the girls he really liked to dance. He had been and still was too shy for that.

Oh, he could go up to someone he didn't know very well, or didn't like in that way, and flirt the night away. Unfortunately, when it came to flirting with someone he actually had feelings for, he clammed up and couldn't do it. His mouth became dry, and he got caught on his words.

He had experienced this strange phenomenon more than once with Lily Evans. He would approach her to dance and suddenly lose all train of thought. It had even affected his daily life. Lily would say something, and he would think up a sultry comment, but his tongue froze in his mouth, and he would be unable to utter a word. He had always had a hard time doing things like asking someone on a date. Thus, he came back to his predicament today. It was the last minute, and he still hadn't gotten up the nerve to ask Hermione to accompany him tonight.

He suspected that she was attracted to him. Why she was, he would never know, but she spent much of her spare time down in the dungeons. They would work together on brewing, or they'd just read by the fire together. He suspected that if he decided one day to just up and kiss her, she would enjoy it, as would he, of course, but he never

got up the nerve.

Severus' thoughts were interrupted by his entrance into the Great Hall. It was breakfast time, and the hall was abuzz with students chatting amongst themselves. The teachers' table was filled, as he was the last to arrive. He seated himself in his usual place, right next to Hermione. She turned to him and told him good morning. He grunted at her.

Sighing inwardly, he chastised himself for starting off his interaction with her in a terrible way. He glanced sheepishly at the woman that dominated his thoughts to see her smiling at him despite his grumbling. She quickly turned back to her breakfast and continued eating her scrambled eggs. After a minute, Minerva, who was seated on Hermione's other side, turned and asked her a question.

"Are you ready for the Ball tonight, Hermione?" she asked the younger witch.

Hermione rolled her eyes and heaved a huge sigh. "I suppose I'm as ready as I'll ever be, Minerva," she grumbled.

"You don't sound very excited," Minerva mused.

Hermione shook her head. "No, I'm not. I hate this Ball, yet we are all forced to attend year after year. I would rather spend my time remembering those who fell that night than to have a bunch of people I don't even know very well make boring speeches about a battle they weren't even present at."

Severus scowled and gave his opinion. "It's completely annoying to listen to them go on about something they know nothing about." He frowned along with Hermione.

"Yes, it's true. I too would rather have a quiet evening," Minerva remarked, "but we must attend, and we may as well make the best of it."

Hermione huffed. "That's easy for you to say! You don't have every male wizard clamoring for a dance with you. I swear, from the minute they start playing the music until the band packs up for the night, I am bombarded with invitations to dance. I can hardly get a break."

"I would think that a young girl like you would enjoy all of that attention!" Minerva exclaimed.

Hermione looked over at Minerva. "Oh, I would, if the attention were truly directed at me. All those men want is to say that they danced with the female third of the Golden Trio. They could care less about what I look like, what I have to say, or anything else about me. I'm just a trophy dance to them. It annoys me to no end."

Minerva sighed. "I see why you're so upset. It must be hard to know why they're truly dancing with you."

"No, it's not. The only people who dance with me, for me, are Ron and Harry. Everyone else is just hoping for their picture in the paper. But I'll go and grit my teeth as I get my feet stepped on and have to make small talk with imbeciles. That's my duty now, after all, being a war hero."

"Hermione, you are way too cynical for your age," Minerva mused.

Hermione just shrugged and went back to her eggs. Minerva, however, wasn't done.

"Look at all you've accomplished. You are a wonderful Transfiguration teacher, almost as good as I was."

This elicited a grin to the Headmistress from Hermione.

"Your research articles have been published in the most famous Wizarding journals. You travel the globe giving lectures on everything from Transfiguration to Potions. You are a highly respected member of the Wizarding world."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "That may very well be, but in that room tonight, I will just be an object to twirl around the dance floor, just so those men can say that they danced with me. I'm truly sick of being a 'celebrity.' It grows very tiresome after a while."

"Yes," mused Severus. "The fan mail alone is impossible to get through."

Hermione whipped around to look at Severus. "You get fan mail?" she asked incredulously.

Severus shrugged, but looked a bit put out. "There doesn't seem to be a single woman in all of England who doesn't want to spend an evening with the 'elusive double agent who just needs to be loved.'"

Hermione laughed out loud. "Do you accept many offers, Severus?"

Severus scowled. "I have no desire to be ogled by women who have turned me into some ladies' man in their heads. They just think I am a project."

"Poor Severus," Minerva mused. "It must be hard to be chased down the street by a flock of women every time you show your face in public."

Hermione threw her head back and laughed some more. "Oh, I can just see it!" she exclaimed.

Severus scowled. "Neither one of you is very funny."

Hermione continued laughing as she got up from the table. "While this is all very entertaining," she said in between giggles, "I have classes to prepare for. I will see the both of you tonight at the dance."

Before Severus had a chance to think, she was gone. He had missed his last opportunity. She never came to lunch, and dinner was provided at the Ball. He sighed. Maybe he wasn't supposed to go with her. But he so wanted to, especially after her complaining about the attention she got there. He could not understand why none of those men saw the merits in the beautiful and intelligent Hermione Granger. Well, their loss was his gain. Whether he was her date or not, he would force himself to ask her to dance. He would do his best to monopolize her time and make her forget there were any other men in that room. Nerves and shyness be damned.

oooOOooo

Hermione entered the large hall and looked around. The Ball was always in the same Wizarding hall. It was an old mansion that was located just down the street from the Ministry. The home had once belonged to Nicholas Flamel. It had been one of many that the man had owned and lived in throughout the world. He had donated the mansion to the Ministry for just this purpose, as an entertainment center. The main floor consisted of a large ballroom with a kitchen off to the side. The upstairs had sitting rooms and other areas where guests could converse with one another privately without loud music forcing them to shout. The whole mansion was truly splendid. Hermione looked around the ballroom, admiring the beautiful marble floor. Huge windows with thick tan curtains lined every wall. An enormous crystal chandelier sat in the middle of the ceiling, giving its light to the entire room. There were tables set along the edge of the hall, but the center was empty in anticipation of the dance to follow the dinner.

Hermione made her way to the front table, which was reserved for the likes of heroes like her. She had purposely arrived five minutes late. She had cringed at even being that late, but she wanted to be here for as little time as possible. Unfortunately for her, her intense sense of decorum prevented her from being able to bring herself to arrive any later than that.

She noticed she was the last to arrive. Harry, of course, was seated at the center of the table with Ginny and Ron to his left. An empty chair was on his right, waiting for her. Hermione smiled when she noticed that Severus Snape had sat himself on her other side. Perhaps the evening wouldn't be a total loss after all.

She rounded the table and quickly went to Harry, who had stood up to give her a great bear hug.

"Oi, Hermione, way to make an entrance! I think every eye was on you as you crossed the floor. You look wonderful." Harry pulled back so he could admire her some more.

She had pulled her hair up into an elegant French twist and wore a beautiful floor-length purple gown. The skirt fell away from her, but the bodice was form-fitting. She wore a dark purple velvet jacket that topped off the dress perfectly. She did a little spin for Harry, and he nodded his head at her.

"So, why haven't you come by lately?" he demanded.

"Sorry, Harry. I've been busy."

"You're too busy to see your best mate?" Harry cried while looking at her with mock sadness.

Hermione let her shoulders droop. "Harry, you just got married a few months ago. The last thing you need is me popping in and being a third wheel!"

Harry narrowed his eyes at Hermione. "Nonsense. If you've been keeping away because of that, then I'll have to hex you. You know you are always welcome!"

Ginny, who was standing next to Harry with her arm around his waist, added her opinion. "Yes, Hermione, you know you can come by any time."

"I'm sorry," Hermione said. "I won't be so self-conscious from now on."

By this time Ron had wandered over to Hermione's side. He threw his arms around her and gave her a huge hug and kissed her on the cheek.

"Ron! It's so good to see you!" Hermione exclaimed as she hugged him tightly.

"You too! The only thing bad about living out of the country is that I never get to see you guys!"

Ron played Keeper for the Heidelberg Harriers, based in Germany. He had been on the team for four years now and was quite the Quidditch sensation.

Hermione looked at Ron sternly. "That doesn't mean you can't answer a simple owl, Ronald Weasley!"

Ron looked duly chastised. "You know me, Hermione, I never write."

"Yes, we've been best mates for how long now, and I have never received one owl from you. And yet I still go out of my way to send notes to you." Hermione lifted her head away and pretended to be put out.

"I just don't know how to put quill to paper. It's not that I don't think about you often."

Hermione looked back over at him and smiled.

"Oh! I almost forgot. I need to introduce you to someone." Ron motioned for the woman who was seated next to him at the table to come over. She rose from her seat and gracefully glided over to him.

"This..." Ron said proudly to Hermione as Harry and Ginny watched and smiled, "...is Eva. She's from Heidelberg. She's a big fan. We've been dating now for six months."

Ron looked at Eva lovingly as he put his arm around her waist. Eva smiled shyly at the three friends. Hermione extended her hand.

"It's a pleasure, Eva! I hope Ron hasn't said too many bad things about me."

Eva laughed lowly. "He says only good things," she said in halting English. "You will be always dear friend."

Hermione smiled while she sized up the woman in front of her. She was quite lovely, with large dark brown curls that went half way down her back. She was tall. She came up to Ron's shoulder, and he was a large man. Her eyes were a deep blue. Eva seemed a good match for her old boyfriend. Hermione had always hoped that Ron would find someone who truly fit well with him. She and Ron had tried to date, but had quarreled constantly. They had finally realized they got along much better when they weren't dating, so the relationship hadn't lasted more than a few months.

"Eva and I met at a party after one of my games," Ron explained as he squeezed the woman next to him. "She is a groupie and follows the team wherever we play. She and I were attracted to each other right from the start."

The sound of a spoon being hit against a glass brought the attention of the five of them to the front of the room. Minister Shacklebolt was standing at the podium, asking that everyone take their seats so the program could begin. They all sat down, and Hermione smiled at Severus as she was seated. He nodded to her.

The dinner was delicious. Prime rib, baked potato, and green beans, with a strawberry topped cheesecake for dessert. Hermione leaned over to Severus as she dug into her cheesecake.

"The only good thing about this pompous affair is the food," she whispered to him.

He nodded his head.

During the meal, there had been a flurry of people at the podium, gushing praises for the honorees. The heroes' table was toasted numerous times. Each time, all of the heroes seemed to be a bit flustered as none of them liked the attention they were getting this evening. But they all raised their glasses and accepted the toasts. After all, that was what was expected of them. Finally, the meal and speeches were over. The room was being prepared for the dance part of the evening. Hermione excused herself with the pretext of having to freshen up.

She made her way up the stairs to one of the sitting rooms. After breakfast this morning, she had come up with a plan. Tired of being sought after because of her name, she decided to do something about it. She had made her appearance as a war hero, and although she knew many would be seeking her out, she truly would not be missed at the dance. She could not make an exit, however, because the exit was warded so that none of the heroes could leave before the end of the ball. Her crafty mind had come up with a compromise. She would transfigure her appearance and attend the dance. Maybe someone would ask her to dance just because they liked the way she looked tonight, not because she was famous.

She took her wand and went to work. Standing in front of a small table with a mirror behind it, Hermione began with her hair. She pulled it out of its twist and waved her wand over it. It immediately straightened. She turned and marveled at how long it really was. All of those curls made it look much shorter. When completely straight, it fell to the middle of her back.

Now for the face glammers. She left her eyes the way they were. She wanted Harry and Ron to know it was her, but no one else. She modified her nose, making it a bit longer and thinner. Her eyebrows became thin lines, and her lips became a bit fuller. Then her skin tanned nicely. That was good enough. She didn't look at all like herself. She was now a different person. She hadn't made herself drop-dead gorgeous because she didn't want that kind of attention, but she was quite pretty.

Now she needed to modify her outfit. She felt like the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella* as she waved her wand around herself and her purple, taffeta dress turned into a red, form-fitting, floor-length gown. The neck came down in a v-shape which was a little revealing, but not too daring. The sleeves fell just below her shoulders, and the v-shaped material wrapped itself around her waist. This skirt, instead of flaring out, hugged her body. She admired herself in the mirror before she went back out to the dance floor.

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Severus had been about to ask Hermione if she would like to dance, when she had excused herself and left the room. Severus scowled. Didn't she know how long he had been coaching himself in what to say and do? Didn't she know that it would take him forever to get up the nerve to ask her again? Of course she didn't know... She had no idea that he was so incredibly shy. Why would she? He wasn't shy about anything else. He would have thought that forty-three years of life would have cured him of his shyness, but it hadn't. It had been a burden he had lived with all of his life, and it had pretty much ruined that life.

He had known Lily had liked him. He had *known* it! She would glance his way and smile. He had so wanted to do something about it, but he couldn't. He had spent hours psyching himself up to ask her out, or to just up and kiss her, but he had always chickened out in the end. He had known she was waiting for him to make a move, but he hadn't been able to bring himself to do it.

He didn't understand. When it didn't matter, he had no trouble talking to girls. But when it had come to Lily, his mouth had always gone dry, his heart would start to flutter, and he had constantly become tongue tied. She had eventually thought he had only liked her as a friend. Then the Mudblood incident had occurred, and he had lost her forever. She had started to like Potter and had never recovered from that malady. He still wondered what might have been if he had just once been brave enough to tell her that he liked her, but that was not to be. Now twenty years later, he found himself in much the same predicament.

Hermione liked him, he knew it. He just needed to open up his mouth! He shook his head. The two of them would be dancing by the end of the night, even if it killed him! He would not let another chance at happiness slip through his fingers like he had done with Lily.

"You seem to be far away," Harry mused to Severus.

The music had started. Some people were already on the dance floor. Unfortunately, Potter was not one of them. He continued to stand by Severus' side, waiting for who knew what? Potter and he had a tenuous relationship. Each of them was civil to the other, but that was as far as it ever went. Severus knew that Harry wanted to ask him about his mother, but he never did. Severus counted on Harry's Gryffindor sensibilities to assure that the topic was never brought up.

"Whoa!" Harry said. "Who's that?"

Severus looked over to where he was pointing and saw a young lady in a flashy red dress entering the hall from the stairway. He furrowed his brow. He had not noticed this woman before, and he had perused all of the guests during dinner. She was quite pretty with long, dark-brown hair that went straight down her back. She seemed familiar somehow, but Severus couldn't place her. He didn't think he'd ever seen her before, but he couldn't shake the feeling that they had met. He watched the woman as she walked along the sidelines of the dance floor, slowly making her way nearer to Harry and him. She stopped a little way away from them and looked out into the room to watch the dancing.

Harry, too, had been watching her. He had noticed that she looked familiar, but he knew he had never seen the woman before. Her tanned skin mixed with her dark brown hair would definitely be unforgettable. As she got closer, she saw him glance his way. Those eyes... he knew those eyes.

"If you'll excuse me, Severus," he said to his colleague.

Severus nodded to him as Harry made his way to the woman's side.

"Would you care for a dance?" Harry asked her.

She smiled brilliantly at him and took his hand. "I would love to!"

They went out onto the floor and were soon arm in arm, dancing slowly to a popular love song.

"Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Can't fool you for a minute, Harry," Hermione gushed.

"What are you up to?" Harry asked her.

"Well, I get tired of being used as a trophy at these dances," she explained as she turned her head. "I want to just dance with someone because they think I'm interesting, not because they want a photo op."

Harry nodded his head. "You've had it the worst of all of us. I've always had Ginny, and Ron usually comes with a date too. But you get bombarded from all sides by the men."

Hermione glanced towards Severus as Harry and she danced. "It's true," she said with a sigh. "I think I've come up with a pretty good remedy this year, though."

Harry nodded. He noticed her glance off to the side again and looked to see who she was looking at. He grimaced.

"Um, Hermione, why do you keep looking over at Snape?"

"Hmm? I'm not..."

"Yes, you are. You've looked over there a couple of times now. I saw you glancing over at him at dinner too. Is something going on with you two?"

Hermione laughed. "Hardly! The man is so absorbed in himself he doesn't even know there's a world around him."

Harry glanced over at Snape again. He was eyeing the two of them dancing. "He seems to notice us dancing."

Hermione glanced over as well. Severus averted his eyes and looked the other way.

"I've been trying to get him to notice me for over a year now. It's hopeless. We are friends and actually spend a lot of time together, but that's all. He's not interested. I'm not even sure if he likes women."

"You're forgetting my mother."

Hermione looked into Harry's eyes. They were filled with mirth.

"Okay, maybe I'm being a little harsh. I just thought... well, he's quite friendly with me... it's just so odd the way he acts."

"Do you think he likes you?"

Hermione narrowed her eyes and chanced a glance at Severus. He was looking at her again.

"Sometimes I think that he does. But he never does anything about it."

"Well, the bloke was pining away for my mum for years. That never worked out. Maybe he just doesn't think that something with you is possible."

Hermione shrugged. "Maybe."

"So, why don't *you* do something?"

Hermione looked to Harry in shock. "Did you just suggest that I make a move on Severus Snape? Isn't he still arch-enemy number one?"

Harry laughed. "I'll admit your taste is a bit odd, Hermione. I don't see what you can see in him, especially after the way he treated us as students. But it's your life. If he makes you happy, who am I to argue with you about it?"

Hermione got a big grin on her face and hugged Harry. "Thanks, Harry. You're a good friend."

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Severus narrowed his eyes at the couple dancing. They had been extremely friendly from the time Potter had asked her to dance. He had noticed the both of them glancing over to him occasionally and wondered if they were speaking about him. Then the woman had hugged Potter. The whole affair just seemed odd. Finally the song ended, and the woman returned to the sidelines. Harry sought out Ginny, who was talking with Ron and his date. Harry whispered something to Ron before leading Ginny out onto the dance floor. Ron in turn whispered something to his date, kissed her hand, and then made a beeline for the woman Harry had just danced with. Severus arched an eyebrow as he asked her to dance. She smiled as if she had known him all her life, and the couple set out for the dance floor.

Severus put it all together, finally. The familiarity he had felt, coupled with her friendliness to Potter and Weasley, could only mean one thing. Hermione Granger had used a glamour to hide her identity. He watched the couple closely to confirm his hypothesis. Sure enough, she spoke to Weasley as if they had known each other for years. When the dance had finished, she hugged him and headed back to the sidelines. Weasley immediately returned to his date and pulled her to the dance floor to dance to a livelier melody.

Severus looked back to Hermione. He understood what she was doing. After her rant that past morning, he knew she was fed up with all the fake attention she got at this event. The woman just wanted some peace and quiet.

Severus smirked to himself. Little did she know that she had just opened the door for Severus to make a move. With her in disguise, Severus could pretend that he didn't know her at all. It would be no problem for him to ask her to dance now. She was just a person at the dance. He might even be able to have a decent conversation with her if he could keep her true identity out of his mind for a few minutes. He took a deep breath and started toward her. Unfortunately, he was beaten out by Draco Malfoy. Why Draco was here in the first place was a mystery, as he certainly wasn't a war hero. The Ministry, especially Kingsley Shacklebolt, had felt sorry for him, thus his invitation as a survivor of war. Unfortunately for Draco, he wouldn't survive the night if he monopolized all of Hermione's time this evening.

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Hermione couldn't believe it. Draco Malfoy had asked her to dance. She almost laughed in his face but, instead, gracefully took his hand and let him lead her out to dance. If only Draco knew he was dancing with his Mudblood nemesis!

"My name is Draco," he said sultrily. "What's yours?"

"Jean," Hermione responded.

"What do you do, Jean?"

Time for some fun. "I'm an Auror, Mr. Malfoy."

Draco's suave smile dropped from his face. His family was carefully watched for signs of Death Eater activities. He was constantly tailed by Aurors on a daily basis.

"I don't suppose you're here watching me, are you?" he snapped.

Hermione's eyebrows shot up. "Why would you ever think that?"

"Because you know my last name, and you people can't leave me or my family alone for half a minute!" he said rather loudly. Dropping his hands from around her midsection, he turned and stalked off the dance floor. Hermione smirked after him and returned to her spot along the wall.

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Severus watched the whole scene play out. It had lasted no more than two minutes. Whatever Hermione had said to Draco had set him off, and the young man had stalked off, leaving Hermione by herself. Severus made his way toward her as she returned to her place on the side.

"Miss, would you like to dance? I noticed Mr. Malfoy was quite rude, and I wouldn't want you to think horribly of every Slytherin here because of his horrid actions."

Hermione's eyes grew wide. Severus Snape was asking her to dance. But it was written law that Severus Snape never danced. Why would he be asking her to dance now? Had the world ended, and no one in the room knew it? She robotically took Severus' outstretched hand and let him lead her to the dance floor. She felt his arms around her, and they began to dance.

"You probably already know that I'm Severus Snape, but I am at a loss as to who you are," Severus drawled.

"My name is Jean," she told him.

"Are you here with someone, Jean?"

"No, I came alone."

"It seems to me that a beautiful woman like you should never go anywhere alone."

Hermione's mouth almost dropped open. Severus Snape was flirting with her. Severus Snape could flirt? Yes, definitely the entire world had come to an end.

"Thank you," she managed to mumble, still in shock.

He was getting closer to her. He pulled her in towards him.

"You are truly the most beautiful woman here. I especially love your eyes," he told her in his most seductive voice.

Hermione felt herself swoon. Gads, his voice was making her shiver. She hoped he didn't notice. If he did, he didn't mention it.

"It seems to me that everyone else in this room must be blind not to see how wonderful you are," Severus continued. His face was slowly coming toward hers.

Hermione gulped. "Thank you, Mr. Snape."

"Call me Severus."

"Severus."

"What spell have you cast over me tonight, Jean? I find I cannot draw my eyes away from you."

His lips were so close to hers, she could feel his breath on her lips. He was staring into her eyes, and she found she could not look away. It was as if he had hypnotized her. She was drawn to his eyes and was sinking into their depths.

Suddenly, his lips were on hers. He kissed her, and she felt as if she would fall to the ground. His lips pressed urgently against hers, and his tongue begged entrance into her mouth. She opened willingly for him and felt him explore her. Their tongues danced, and she could barely breathe. Why couldn't he have kissed her like this ages ago?

Then it all came crashing down upon her. She realized what she looked like. She realized he was kissing Jean, not Hermione. She realized he did like women, he just didn't like her. A single tear fell down her cheek as she was lost in his kiss. Sensing something, Severus pulled away.

"You're crying," he stated.

"I'm sorry! I... I just need to get some fresh air. Excuse me." Hermione pulled out of his arms and stumbled away from him. She gathered herself together and headed for the door to the balcony. She rushed outside and to the edge of the balcony, leaning over the rail.

She was elated and destroyed all in one. His kiss had been amazing. It was truly the fieriest kiss she had ever received. It had electrified her body. But he hadn't kissed the real her. He was attracted to this fake she had made. That could only mean that he had no interest in the real her. She had hoped for all of this time that he could maybe be attracted to her. She had been deluding herself. He was just her friend. He felt nothing for her in that way. Hermione let the tears fall down her face. She didn't care if anyone saw her. No one knew that Hermione Granger, war hero, had just had her heart broken.

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Severus stared after her in puzzlement. Everything had been going so nicely. He had found a voice he never thought he could have with Hermione. Her glamour had given him the freedom to say what he was truly feeling, but she had run from him. He stayed still on the dance floor as he watched her hurry towards the balcony. He could tell she was crying harder. What had he done?

Her hair flowed behind her as she ran out the door to her escape. Then everything was clear again. Straight hair... glammers... she didn't know that he knew it was her. She thought he was attracted to Jean and not to her. She couldn't be any more wrong, and he needed to tell her that.

Severus made his way to the balcony. He looked around when he came out and spied her off in the corner, leaning against the stone rail. He wound around the few people in his path and came up to her. He placed a hand on her arm. She turned to look at him.

"Oh, great," she muttered as she turned away and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Hermione..."

Hermione laughed ruefully. "Wonderful, Harry told you it was me. Did you want to apologize for thinking I was someone attractive?"

Severus raised an eyebrow at her. "I have always thought you were someone attractive. Potter didn't need to tell me who you were. I knew before I asked you to dance."

Hermione closed her eyes. This could not be real. He wasn't just saying he knew all along it was her. It was too much to hope for.

"Okay, I'm going to count to three," Hermione instructed. "Then I'll open my eyes, and you and this crazy hallucination will be gone."

Severus laughed and turned her around so she was facing him. She opened her eyes and caught her breath. He was looking right into her eyes, and she found herself drowning again.

"I'm sorry you thought that I didn't know it was you, Hermione. I wouldn't have said any of that to someone I wasn't incredibly attracted to."

"You really meant all of that? You said that to *me*?" she asked, her eyes never leaving his.

"I did," he confessed. Then he was kissing her again. This time he poured his whole soul into the kiss, trying to convey that it was truly Hermione that he wanted. He heard her moan into him and knew he had succeeded. He couldn't believe that this beautiful witch was enjoying his kisses. He should have done this months ago!

At long last, they pulled apart. Hermione looked back into Severus' eyes. He saw affection and desire there, affection and desire for him. He smiled at her.

"Why did you pick tonight to reveal all of this to me?" Hermione asked.

"You must forgive me, Hermione. I have wanted to tell you of my feelings for a long time now, but I just couldn't. Your glamour helped me to say things I couldn't possibly bring myself to say to you before for fear that you would laugh at me."

"Merlin, Severus, I would never laugh at you."

"Still, I have always had a hard time expressing my feelings. It's all the worse when those feelings are concerning a beautiful witch."

Hermione beamed at him. She pulled him close and kissed him over and over again. They were rudely interrupted by two hands pulling them apart. The hands belonged to Ron Weasley. He looked at Severus furiously.

"What in Merlin's name do you think you're doing?" he yelled in Severus' face.

"I believe, Mr. Weasley, that I was kissing someone that I am incredibly attracted to," Severus stated blandly.

"You can't! You will not... she is not for you," Ron stuttered. "You have no idea who she really is, and I will not have her hurt."

Hermione placed her hand on Ron's arm. "Please, Ron, calm down. Everything's fine."

"Could I speak to you privately for a minute, Jean?" Ron asked as he grabbed her arm and steered her away from Severus.

Hermione motioned to Severus that she would return in a minute and let herself be dragged to the other side of the balcony so she could listen to Ron rant for a while.

"What are you doing, kissing that git?" he began.

"Ron, please, I am an adult and can do what I wish."

"And what happens when he finds out who you are and demeans you for being a know-it-all or Merlin knows what?"

"He won't do that, Ron..."

"Of course he will. He's heartless. He lives to demean people. He'll crush you for embarrassing him."

"Ron, he already knows it's me!"

"No, he doesn't," Ron retorted dubiously.

Hermione sighed. She took her wand and waved it over her head. All of her glamours fell away, and she stood before Ron in her red dress, her normal body once again restored. She turned, smiled, and waved to Severus. He smiled and waved back. Ron stared at him in incredulity.

"He knew it was you?"

"Yes."

"And he still was snogging you senseless?"

"Yes."

"He's attracted to you?" Ron squeaked.

"Yes."

"And you... are attracted," he pointed to Severus, "to him?"

Hermione glanced over at Severus and sighed. "Incredibly so."

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Ron muttered.

Hermione smiled at him. "Thanks for the support, oh, best friend of mine."

"Hermione, you're mental!" Ron exclaimed. "How could you be attracted to that?" He pointed at Severus once again.

Hermione ignored him and smiled at Severus.

"Oh, gads, you have it bad," Ron mumbled.

"Thanks for the chat, Ron," Hermione murmured as she patted him on the back and began to move back toward Severus.

Ron glanced at her and then at Snape. He frowned and rushed past Hermione and over to Severus. He grabbed him by his robes.

"I'm telling you, Snape, if you hurt her, you'll have to deal with me!"

"I'm quaking in my dragon skin boots, Weasley."

Ron sneered but let Severus' robes go with a thrust of his hands. "Just don't hurt her, do you understand?"

"I have no intention of hurting her," Severus said as he watched Hermione approach him. "She is a dream come true."

If Ron's jaw wasn't attached to his skull, it would have clattered to the floor. He gaped at Snape.

"Holy Mother of Merlin, you love her!"

Severus looked Ron in the eye. "Guilty as charged, Mr. Weasley," he replied with a sigh.

Ron sputtered. "Y... you... you love... her?" he said as he pointed to Hermione, who was now standing right beside him.

"Did I stutter, Mr. Weasley? I already said that. I love her. She is the perfect woman. I hope she never figures out what a fool I am, because I fear she will run screaming from me. Does that answer your question?"

"What's next? Will Hagrid and Trelawney start dating? Will the Giant Squid start a relationship with Sprout? This is absurd! How can you two possibly be in love?"

Hermione put her hand on the flustered man's shoulder.

"Bye, Ron," she muttered.

"Huh?" Ron said blankly as he turned his head and looked at Hermione. "Oh, right. Well, I guess I wish you luck." He cleared his throat and got a scared look on his face as everything sunk in. "I think."

Hermione smiled at him. "Thanks, Ron. You're a good friend. Now if you have to tell Harry, tell him to leave us alone."

"Okay," Ron said as he turned and left, still in a fog.

Hermione watched him and then laughed. She turned back to Severus and felt a shock run through her as he stared at her intensely.

"You love me, huh?" Hermione asked.

Severus moved to her side and pulled her into his arms. His fear came back to him as he looked into her eyes. This was utterly ridiculous. He knew she cared about him. Yet he still found it hard, when looking into her beautiful face, to tell her the truth about his feelings. He steeled himself and made himself speak. "I love you," he said finally. Hermione was looking at him intensely, urging him to be able to say what he wanted to say. He gulped and finally found the strength to continue. "I love your eyes. I love the way your hair gets frizzy in the humidity. I love the way you laugh. I love how we always spend time in front of the fireplace, discussing magical theories. I am thoroughly, hopelessly, in love with you."

Hermione's heart was thudding within her. "You're quite the romantic for someone who claims to be incredibly shy."

"You inspire me," he told her as he came in for another kiss.

Hermione gasped as he kissed her. Her heart leaped at his words. She lost herself in his intense kiss. The entire world became just Severus Snape and her. They became one and nothing else in the world mattered.

He pulled back after a while and smiled at her.

"I love you too," Hermione burst out. She pulled him to her again and showed him just how deep that love for him was.

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Severus pulled his wife to him in the bed. She snuggled up next to him, still half asleep. They had only been married for a month, but Severus had never been happier. He still found it hard to believe that the young, beautiful witch beside him had condescended to be his bride. He had certainly reaped the benefits of overcoming his shyness.

He looked at Hermione as she slept. Her hair fell around her face in ringlets, and her lips were slightly pouted. The woman was adorable. He thanked Merlin every day that he had finally found the courage to open his mouth about his feelings. Since then, he had never let his shyness overcome him again... at least not with Hermione. Their love had blossomed from there.

Severus tenderly kissed her forehead. He hadn't meant to wake her, but her eyes opened at his touch. She smiled at him, and his heart constricted with his love and longing for her.

"Good morning," Hermione told him as she continued to grin at him.

"Good morning, my beautiful wife."

"You spoil me with compliments, Severus," she confessed.

"I do my best to show my admiration for you," he admitted with a grin of his own.

"I think it's time I returned the favor," she told him as she pushed up onto an elbow. She stroked his cheek. "You are so incredibly sexy, Severus. I love the way your eyes look at me with passion. I love the way your lips curve into a smile."

"I only smile when I'm with you."

"Well, you're with me a lot, so you smile a lot," Hermione said with a grin. She continued with her admiration. "I love how you show that you love me through little things, like leaving a flower on my desk or sending me love letters by owl when you're sitting right beside me in the Great Hall. But mostly, I love how you can be irate with the world, but you'll always speak to me kindly, no matter that you've just been screaming at a dunderheaded student." She caressed his face lovingly. "You don't know how much it means to me that you curb your temper and speak to me with kindness, no matter what your mood."

"I am no fool, Hermione. I understand the difference between work and my relationship with you. You make work and everything else bearable. I would never want to ostracize you for the actions of another."

"I think it's only fair that you receive some reward for such good behavior," Hermione told him as she placed a kiss on his cheek.

"That certainly wasn't my reward, was it?" Severus asked as he pulled back and gave his wife a curious look.

"Of course not, that's just the promise of things to come."

"Whatever do you have in mind, Mrs. Snape?"

"Oh, just some fun under the covers," she said silkily as she caressed his chest.

She threw the covers over them and giggled as he started attacking her neck. She knew they wouldn't be getting out of bed for some time.

**The End**