

Plotting With The Potions Professor

by sunny33

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The sight of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore standing once again, wand to his neck, stilled the clamour of excited voices towards the end of the start-of-term feast. Harry Potter and his two best friends, back at Hogwarts to complete their seventh year, looked at each other in mild consternation. What was the old man up to now? The spectacle of his return from the dead a few hours after Voldemort's demise, followed by his revival of Severus Snape from what had transpired to be a coma, not death, had left them all bemused. Harry was still trying to comprehend Dumbledore's explanation of his presence in that in-between world where he spoke to Harry of his past and the Hallows, then sent him back, never disclosing that he was planning to follow soon after.

"Ahem. Now you have all eaten, I have one final surprise. I am delighted to announce, in celebration of last spring's victory over Tom Riddle, that this year we will reinstate the Yule Ball, which has been sadly missing during the last few years of unrest. In conjunction with this, I have also re-introduced compulsory formal dance classes into the senior curriculum. These used to be a regular part of a young witch's or wizard's education here at Hogwarts before the Dark times befell us all. It is time to return to the lighter things in life!" Dumbledore declared as he beamed around the Great Hall.

Amidst excited murmurs from the students, especially the senior girls, who were already envisaging themselves dancing the night away with their current wizard of interest, Hermione Granger noticed Snape's lip curl into his trademark sneer. *Not one for dancing then, Professor?* she thought with an internal smirk of her own. Not that she blamed him. Dumbledore's idea of dancing was confined to prissy, old-fashioned, "let's not get too close" forms or allowing his students to shake and shuffle to mindless, disharmonic *noise*. Having been a student of the graceful art of ballroom dancing and the sexier Latin style since the age of six, her experiences of dancing with her peers had been abysmal to say the least. She had learned at an early age that ballroom dancing was not considered "cool" and had kept that part of her life a secret, even from Harry and Ron.

Dumbledore continued on, explaining that the ball would be a masked affair, and dance classes were to start later in the week for all students fourth year and above. He wished them all well and returned to his lemon tart.

Harry and Ron shared identical looks of horror at the headmaster's announcement. "Not again," wailed Ron. "Why do we have to *dance*? Can't we just go to the ball, drink the spiked punch, snog our girlfriends, and have a good time?"

"Dance lessons, twice a week, for *three months*!" Harry was equally distraught. Ginny slapped him on the arm, hard. "Ouch! What was that for?" he demanded.

"It wouldn't hurt you to learn how to dance decently, Harry James Potter! And if you think for a moment that you are escorting *me* to the ball, I will expect you to apply

yourself at dance class. Or I might just have to partner Neville. Again. You would go with me, wouldn't you, Neville, dear?" she called sweetly over the table.

"Of course I would, milady, if that lummock of a boyfriend of yours won't do the honourable thing and learn to dance." Neville stood and performed a few twirls holding an imaginary partner in his arms. Killing Nagini had given him a much-needed boost of confidence.

Hermione's mood lifted at the antics of her friends. At least the ball should provide some humorous moments, if nothing else.

The first dance lesson arrived far too rapidly for most of the participants. On Thursday after dinner, the seventh years trooped into the Great Hall, emptied of tables and benches to accommodate the class. Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall stood at the front of the Hall and beckoned the reluctant students to join them.

"Now, students, we will begin with the simple box-step you will recall from the previous Yule Ball. Watch carefully as Professor McGonagall and I demonstrate the steps, and then find a partner to practice with," the headmaster instructed, gesturing to his colleague to join him. Standing stiffly, at least a foot apart, the two proceeded to box-step for the students, accompanied by verbal instructions from the headmaster. Other members of the staff were present to assist where needed.

Hermione, who was leaning against the wall in a dark corner of the Hall, rolled her eyes at the scene before her. It was worse than she remembered. Their dance-hold was appalling, their movements stilted, and their timing left a lot to be desired. And that was the professors who were supposed to be teaching. She sighed and took out a book, intent on avoiding notice.

"Why, Miss Granger, I do believe that could be interpreted as disrespect of our esteemed headmaster. Do you have any reason why I should not deduct a satisfying number of points from Gryffindor for your little display?" Snape's low murmur nearly startled her into dropping her text.

Remembering his expression at the announcement of the ball and assuming she would be losing House points regardless, she dared to look the Potions professor in the eye and challenge him. "I would assume by the very fact that you are lurking here out of sight as well, that you are as eager to participate in these lessons as I am, Professor." She stood her ground as he stared at her, no longer afraid of this dour ex-spy, teacher, and reluctant hero. Her surprise as he relaxed against the wall beside her, and his mouth twitched into what might have been interpreted as a slight smile, was matched only by her astonishment at his next words.

"You would be correct, Miss Granger. That travesty they are performing does not deserve the description of dancing, and the chances of your classmates matching even *that* are minimal," he smoothly replied, indicating the sheepish boys and the giggling girls, who were having difficulty with the simple step they were attempting.

Hermione gaped at her teacher as his words sunk in. "*You* know something about dancing?"

He turned his head and smirked at her. "One doesn't attend soirees at Malfoy Manor for twenty years without learning the rudiments of civilised behaviour. Not all Death Eater gatherings involved torture and killing of Muggles, contrary to popular belief. For the most part, they were opportunities for the purebloods to try to outdo each other in displays of wealth, fine robes, food, and wine. Along with that came the formal dancing and the usual power plays between families," he stated sardonically.

She watched her classmates and their inept teachers for a few moments, unsure how to respond to Snape's uncharacteristic candour. Finally, she looked at him and simply nodded in acknowledgement of his explanation. "They won't get very far if they keep looking at their feet all the time," she commented.

"And since when have *you* been an expert in the area? Or as the official school know-it-all, does your book knowledge extend to this as well?" He waved his hand in the direction of the students.

"Actually, I have attended ballroom and Latin dance classes since I was six years old. My dance partner and I were regularly entering competitions before Voldemort ruined my summers." As his scepticism issued from a single raised eyebrow, she added, "None of my friends here know. It was never something I felt comfortable sharing with them."

"Not even Potter or your red-headed boyfriend?" he asked, appearing genuinely curious.

"Ronald is *not* my boyfriend, and, no, they don't know either. It just never came up," she replied weakly.

His face assumed a calculating expression which concerned her somewhat. Unnerved, she quickly smiled and joined the class, preferring to feign an equal incompetence at dancing to spending any longer in the company of an oddly communicative Snape. The next time she looked at the corner in which they had held that strange conversation, he had disappeared.

Normal classes continued as always with essays to write and texts to study. Professor Snape assumed his usual cloak of surliness and indifference towards her in class as if their few shared words had never occurred. Monday evening came around all too soon and, with it, the second dance lesson. A few of her class had actually been seen to practise their steps, but only in the privacy of their own common rooms. Harry and Ron had avoided any mention of dance lessons, preferring to hope they would simply go away if they wished it hard enough.

Hermione positioned herself as before in the corner while Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall demonstrated a simple waltz. Once again, she had been there only a few minutes when she perceived that she had company.

"Trying to lose more points for evading the lesson, are we, Miss Granger?"

"You would think they would at least demonstrate a little rise and fall, a little grace, wouldn't you?" She ignored his jibe. After all, he had not actually deducted points the previous week.

"I think you would find that the concept of 'rise and fall' would be a mystery to our worthy leaders," he replied.

"You show more elegance just sweeping down the corridors terrifying students than they do," she commented without thinking. Suddenly, she flushed as she realised what she had said. And to whom. "Sorry, sir. I didn't intend offence."

He laughed softly. Actually laughed. Astounded, she stared at him. His face looked years younger without the perpetual scowl, reminding her that he was just thirty-eight. Still a young man for a wizard. "You should do that more often," she told him, smiling. "Takes years off."

Resuming his usual scowl, he glared at her. "One word and it will be detention for a month." At her indignant look, he lifted a corner of his mouth and smirked.

First he laughs, then he teases. Will the world stop turning on its axis next? Will Arabella Figg be voted in as next Minister of Magic? she wondered. Shaking her head, she turned her attention to the class, who were stumbling around to the delicate waltz music like a crowd of blind hippogriffs, Dumbledore beaming proudly at his work.

"Bloody foolish, old man," growled Snape. "He needs to be shown a thing or two about dancing." A look of pure Slytherin cunning crossed his face. "Miss Granger. Would you consider joining me for a little Dumbledore baiting?"

"Professor! How can you suggest such a thing?" she protested unconvincingly, then leaned in closer. "Like what?"

"The Yule Ball is masked. Would you care to show the headmaster exactly how inadequate his lessons really are?"

"Are you suggesting that you.... and I... dance together?"

"Exactly. And not only dance together, but put on a show that would wipe that idiotic grin off his face, at least for a short time. Do not fear, we would be masked and glamourous. No-one would know you were dancing with the nasty Potions professor. Are you up to the task?" Snape challenged.

"That doesn't bother me, Professor. And you are *not* nasty. However, I have an even better idea, if *you* are up to it," she replied. At his questioning glance she asked, "Have you ever done any Latin dancing?"

"I am vaguely familiar with the style, but no, I haven't actually had the pleasure."

"Well, Latin tends to be fairly suggestive, especially the rumba. With a little practice, we could not only show the headmaster up, we could embarrass him hugely in the process."

"That idea is positively Slytherin, Miss Granger. Perhaps I have misjudged you all along?" he asked.

"No more Slytherin for me than the Gryffindor courage it would take for you to perform the rumba in front of all those students," she retorted.

"*Never* call me a coward, Miss Granger," he warned. "Dungeon Four, nine o'clock." He swept away, leaving Hermione wondering just what she had agreed to.

Using a visit to the Prefects' bathroom as her excuse, Hermione slipped out of the Gryffindor common room and headed down to the dungeons. The returning war veterans had been accorded a late curfew of midnight, in deference to their age, as long as they did not cause any disturbance to the younger students. She used a Disillusionment charm in case there were any Slytherin students lurking in the corridors, as her presence there would be awkward to explain. Arriving at Dungeon Four precisely on time, she entered to find the floor had been cleared and charmed smooth, and her Potions master, bereft of his usual teaching robes, awaiting her arrival. He closed the door after her, locking it and setting a Silencing charm.

"Now, as you are the expert, perhaps you will have some idea where we should start, Miss Granger," he suggested.

"Perhaps some basics, so we can assess each other's ability. Do you have any music?" she asked.

"Of course." He waved his wand, and a simple waltz emanated from a small box in the corner. He held out his hand and beckoned her to him. Taking her right hand in his, he placed his right on her waist as she rested her left hand on his right upper arm.

She nodded her readiness to commence, and he took a few faltering steps. She struggled to follow him. "Dammit. This is no better than those idiot classmates of yours."

"It's not quite right, Professor," she hesitantly told him.

"What is wrong?" he asked brusquely, scowling a little.

"Er... you need to hold me a lot closer. To dance properly I need to feel you so I can follow." She blushed as she demonstrated, placing herself close enough so their chests and thighs were in close contact.

His cheeks were also stained a little pink as he replied, "Very well, if that is the way it is done."

This time, she had no difficulty following his movements, and after a few minutes, they both relaxed into the rhythm and sway of the dance. As the music came to an end, Snape twirled her out from his body, pulling her back again in a graceful finale.

"You are correct. That works much better. And I commend you on your ability, Miss Granger. You are indeed a fine dancer." He bowed slightly with his compliment as she flushed.

"And you, sir, are an accomplished dancer also. I have so missed the opportunity to dance properly over the last two years," she finished sadly. "Shall we try something else?"

Over the next thirty minutes, they went through the foxtrot, quickstep, and a breath-stealing Viennese waltz. Hermione begged a rest period as her pulse rate returned to normal.

"Well, it appears that we have little to work on with those dances," he decided. "Is the tango in your repertoire?"

"I'll have you know the tango won us several gold medals," she boasted. "Is it in yours?"

Removing his jacket, Snape hung it on a hook in the wall and looked her in the eye. "Try me."

The music became suitably intense and sultry as they assumed the customary position, this time with Hermione's hand behind his right shoulder and a haughty expression on her face. He bent his knees slightly and began the dance of passion with a sudden dip of his partner over his knee. Smirking at her surprised expression, he proceeded to demonstrate just how well he knew the tango, occasionally catching her unawares with an unfamiliar move. Finishing with another dip, he slowly drew her up to her feet and asked, "Well. Did I pass?"

"That was amazing, Professor! Where on earth did you learn that? I can't imagine that being on the dance program at the Malfoys." She eyed him curiously.

"I spent a few months in Argentina during my Potions apprenticeship. My master used to gather rare ingredients there. He was an aficionado of the tango and insisted I learn as well. He likened the dance to the brewing of a difficult potion, requiring concentration, rhythm, and passion in equal measures. Now, you suggested this Latin dancing. I presume this is something similar to salsa?"

"Similar, but the Latin I learned was probably less freestyle than salsa, in much the same way as the ballroom tango I studied is a little different to your Argentinean tango. In the style I learned there are five specific dances: Cha-cha, samba, rumba, jive, and the paso doble. I was thinking we should practice the rumba, which is more... er... sensual than the tango, but just as... evocative." Once again she flushed as she remembered whom she was talking with. Her Potions professor. Snape.

"Show me," he ordered.

She flicked her wand to change the music to something suitable. A slow, rhythmic melody filled the room. Almost unconsciously, her body started to move in time with the music. She demonstrated some of the basic steps, which he unsurprisingly followed with ease, then stopped.

"Why have you stopped?" he asked.

"I will show you some of the more... suggestive moves, if you just stand still for the moment. I can teach you your part later, once you know what to expect of me." She bit her lower lip, unsure how he would react to the full rumba experience.

He nodded his assent. With that, she sinuously danced around him, then from behind, reached forward and drew her hands down his face, then along his arms, all the while moving her hips against his body. Spinning away from him, she turned back, this time to face him, and lifted her leg to hook around his hip. He quickly realised her intent and placed his arm at her waist as she gracefully arched back away from him, still connected at the hip. As she returned to the upright position, he took the initiative

and lifted her above the level of his head and circled on the spot, letting her slowly lower as he did so. In the process, her breasts brushed past his face, causing both of them to blush at the intimate contact. She wrapped both legs around his hips and leaned back impossibly far to brush the floor with her hair as her arms trailed gracefully above her head. Holding that pose for a long moment, she then reached for his hand to pull her upright and place her on her feet.

Snape released her and turned away, making a discreet adjustment to his clothing as he did so. "I see what you mean. That dance should be more than enough to cause the headmaster a moment or two of embarrassment. That is, if we don't succumb to it ourselves first," he said wryly, indicating their dual flushed faces.

"That's just a matter of practice," she declared, more confident than she felt.

"I think that is quite enough for one night. Same time Thursday, Miss Granger?" he suggested, all business again.

"Fine. Until then, Professor," she agreed as she left.

Later that night, she again pondered the wisdom of her actions. Severus Snape was turning out to be a completely different wizard to the bitter, sarcastic Potions teacher she had known for seven years. This man was more relaxed, even had a sense of humour. There was also no denying that out of his teaching robes and frock coat, with a smile on his face, he almost looked attractive. And then, there was the small matter of that adjustment he had made to his clothing. Was that what she thought it was? She suddenly realised that instead of being horrified, she was flattered. She groaned and covered her face with her hands. Surely not.

Hermione approached Dungeon Four with some trepidation. Unsure of what to expect after last time, she had dressed more appropriately for the practice. Under her school robes she had eschewed the jeans and T-shirt she had worn previously, in favour of her usual practice attire of a tight-fitting top and short, flouncy skirt. Upon entering, she saw Snape already practising the rumba basics. He was a fast learner, having recalled the steps perfectly, and was moving his hips to the sensuous beat of the music. It was intoxicating, watching the way he moved his lean, perfectly proportioned body.

"Miss Granger, are you considering joining me any time soon, or would you rather spend the entire session staring at my arse?" he inquired acidly.

"Yes... Oh, right." She returned to reality with a thud. Ogling her professor's butt was really *not* good form.

"Shall we start by deciding what we will actually do at the ball and go from there?" she suggested once she had reined in her errant libido. "Firstly, how do we get the band to play appropriate music at the right time, and secondly, how do we maintain our anonymity?"

"I will sort out the band," he stated confidently, "and as for the disguise, I suggest that we 'perform' for no more than ten minutes, which should be sufficient to get our point across to the headmaster, without anyone interfering. Perhaps we can make our excuses and disappear separately, with plans to meet in a nearby classroom to change. We can then stage an appropriately dramatic entrance, run through our routine, then exit with equal flair, leaving everyone suitably dumbfounded."

"I see you have spent some time thinking this over," she commented drily. "Haven't been planning a come-uppance for Professor Dumbledore for a while, by any chance?"

"After what that old coot put me through, forcing me to kill him and suffer the consequences..." His expression turned cold. "Do you have any idea what it was like, Miss Granger? To have to kill the only person who had ever given me a second chance, the one man I felt I could confide in. To work against the few people who trusted me and to strive for those that didn't. To be reviled every day whilst risking death or torture to save those same people who would hex my back given the opportunity. To watch innocent children tortured by those damned Carrows and to be forced to feign approval. To be alone, utterly alone, all to fulfil that man's master plan." He gazed off into the distance, lost to bitter memories, only breaking his reverie when a small hand crept into his.

"You are not alone any longer, Professor," she whispered, squeezing his hand gently.

His look of bewilderment at her action spoke, more clearly than words, of his loneliness and unfamiliarity with compassion directed his way. Nodding his acceptance of her gesture, he swallowed and, in a voice husky with emotion, simply said, "Thank you, Hermione."

A few moments later, he somewhat reluctantly let her hand free and returned to his usual self. "What dances do you recommend?"

"I have been thinking about that," she replied. "With only ten minutes or so to work with, we should spend about two minutes on each dance. How about we start with a nice slow waltz give them a false sense of security then switch to the tango, followed by the jive, and then the rumba to finish. That allows us a little leeway for costume changes. Then..."

"Costume changes? And I don't know the jive," he interjected.

"We cannot dance the tango in the same costume as the waltz, and the jive and rumba are different again. With the speed you have picked up the rumba, I don't expect the jive will present any difficulty," she explained, starting to remove her school robes.

"Very well. Perhaps this evening we could go through the rumba again and develop the choreography further, then if you would introduce me to the... What on earth are you *not* wearing, woman?"

"These?" She indicated her attire. "Standard, Muggle, dance practice wear. Is that a problem, Professor?"

"Only that those garments reveal far more of you than I am accustomed to seeing," he muttered.

She raised an eyebrow, imitating his smirk perfectly. "Wait until you see the real costume, Professor. This is positively Victorian by comparison."

He groaned. "Merlin save me from modern witches," he implored. "I am but a man, Hermione."

His use of her given name, for the second time, sent tingles down her spine. Firmly ignoring them, she started the music for the rumba and then pointed her wand at his chest. At his indignant glare, she spelled most of his shirt buttons undone, revealing his pale, but well-defined chest. "There, now we are on even standing. Any other problems? Shall we start?"

They practised the basics and the final set of moves several times until they were performing them without hesitation and even managing to put aside their blushes. With the addition of several more set steps and lifts, the routine was shaping up to be an ideal vehicle for embarrassing their manipulative headmaster.

"I think that's enough of that," Hermione declared, stretching her arms towards the ceiling.

Openly appreciating the view, Snape replied drily, "I agree. There's only so much a man can stand. Can we do something a little less... lascivious?"

"Sure. Let me show you the basic jive. That will sweat out any impure thoughts," she replied cheekily.

Her professor was speechless. In the course of a week or so, she had transformed from a suitably respectful student to this sexy, flirty *woman*. Who was flirting with *him*, of all people.

"Come on, Professor. My cleavage will still be there later. Right now, you need to pay attention."

"Yes, madam." He mock saluted. "Never let it be said that Severus Snape neglected his education for the sake of a beautiful woman."

"Flatterer. But you are not getting out of this," she scolded.

Thirty minutes later, Snape was sitting on the floor, hot and bothered, wondering just how he was supposed to keep up with the bundle of energy beside him. "Impure thoughts. I think that just about sweated out any thoughts I may have ever had. Do you forget I am a decrepit, old Potions master?"

"Nonsense. You are what, thirty-eight? That's still young, even for Muggles. And far from decrepit. You kept up much better than I would expect for a first try. You just need to work on getting your creaky, old knees higher and pointing your toes correctly. And smile. Your Potions class scowl will *not* work on the dance floor. Trust me." With that, she stood, offering him her hand.

"All right, all right. I can get myself up," he grumbled. "But I think my body has had enough for one session. Would you care for some tea while we plan our strategy for the evening further?"

After spending an hour or so in his office and being warned, quite unnecessarily, not to expect him to behave any differently in class, she crept back to her room, senses aflame with the knowledge that deep beneath the veneer of the greasy git, there lay a very different wizard indeed. A witty, talented, even flirtatious wizard, whom she rather fancied. She would definitely keep *that* to herself.

At breakfast, the boys were still grousing about the previous evening's lesson. "I had to dance with Trelawney!" complained Ron with a shudder. "She went all mystical on me and told me to just *feel* the music. How do you feel music? She is totally batty!"

Not as batty as you think, Ronald. Perhaps the sherry hasn't completely addled her brain after all, decided Hermione. Ignoring his continued rant about the cruelty of Dumbledore in making them learn to dance, she glanced up at the staff table. As her eyes met Snape's, she realised he had been watching the interaction at the Gryffindor table with thinly disguised amusement. At least, his mirth was evident to her, now she knew him better. She raised her glass to him in tacit agreement and was rewarded with a quick lift of the corner of his mouth.

"Hermione? I saw that," whispered Neville, who was sitting beside her. "What *is* going on between you and Snape? I've noticed you talk to him at dance lessons when you think no-one is looking."

"Just a private joke," she replied absently.

"Just a private joke," Neville repeated. "*With Snape?* Are you sure you are feeling all right? You do know that is *not* normal behaviour, don't you?"

"Oh, he's not so bad, Neville. You just have to give him a chance."

"I don't want to know. I just don't want to know!" her friend replied, holding his hands over his ears and shaking his head in denial.

Hermione just smiled.

The weeks passed with the usual classes, homework, Dumbledore's dance lessons, and practice with Snape filling the busy Gryffindor's days. She and Snape had fine-tuned the dance routine to their mutual satisfaction and, after practising it each session, spent another hour dancing just for the sheer joy of it. They had developed a close partnership on the dance floor, enabling Snape to lead Hermione in intricate and graceful moves that would have astounded their peers. After their dance session, they would often spend time in his quarters, simply talking, frequently losing themselves in a discussion about this piece of research or that article in the latest *Alchemica*. Sometimes, she would work on some homework while he marked essays, an easy companionship developing that neither questioned. Once or twice, they became so immersed in their conversation that they lost track of time completely. It was well past her curfew when they realised the time. Snape simply transfigured the couch into a bed, offered her the use of his private bathroom, and bid her goodnight. Her friends in Gryffindor gleefully assumed that their swotty friend had found herself a secret boyfriend from Ravenclaw and took great delight in teasing her endlessly about her supposed lover when she stayed out overnight.

Hermione's nights were filled with dreams of a dark-haired lover taking her beyond the heights of her imagination, but she awoke to disappointing reality. So far, he had showed no indication of feelings other than a close friendship and a purely masculine appreciation for the finer points of her figure. She wondered if he would ever see the light. Meanwhile, she was content to spend time with him, discovering the man beneath the black-robed armour.

"What's this I hear about your Ravenclaw beau?" Snape asked one evening while they were skulking in the shadows at dance lesson, his expression carefully guarded.

Hermione sniggered slightly. "Haven't you worked it out yet? I'm supposed to be having a torrid affair with some, as yet undisclosed, Ravenclaw. The boys think that the evenings I spend with you have been in some daring sexual escapade, and I haven't disillusioned them. The Ravenclaw boys are all denying it, of course, but that doesn't stop the rumours. Everyone is assuming that everyone else is hiding something. It's quite entertaining watching them all cast suspicious looks at each other, especially when I go out of my way to speak to one or other of them," she explained.

One night in early December, Hermione finally received, by owl, the costumes she had arranged for the ball. It was time to set Snape his most difficult challenge.

The music faded as they completed the final lift in their, now polished, routine. Hermione stood and retrieved a small package from her robes. Using her wand to return the shrunken item to its normal size, she turned to Snape and announced, "I have our costumes for the ball here. Do you want to try them on?"

"Costumes? I had forgotten that side of things," he replied, eyeing the parcel curiously.

"Right, for the waltz we start with you in a tuxedo and myself in this," she explained, holding out a Muggle style tuxedo and a shimmering, silver ball dress with tiny shoulder straps, a fitted bodice which revealed a hint of cleavage, and a full, spangled skirt. He nodded his acquiescence with her choice and awaited her next instruction. "It would be better if we changed into them now, so I can demonstrate the changes."

They turned away from each other and swiftly changed into the new garments. Hermione turned and continued describing her plan.

"As the music changes to the tango, you need to remove the jacket and tie and unbutton the shirt a little. I will use that time to transfigure the dress and your shirt like this." She demonstrated as he removed the jacket and tie, whisking off the long, flowing, outer layer of the skirt, revealing another layer which was ruched up the side, exposing part of her left leg. With a flick of her wand, both the dress and his shirt were scarlet, causing him to raise his eyebrows in disbelief.

"Red! You would dress me in red?"

"What better way to conceal your identity? Who would expect Severus Snape, the ultimate Slytherin, to wear red?" she countered.

"Point taken," he conceded reluctantly.

She continued. "For the jive, you will stay the same, and I will simply remove another layer." The ruched skirt was thrown to one side, revealing a knee length, fringed skirt beneath. "Then, the final costume."

His eyes gaped at the brevity of her current attire. Finally finding his voice, he growled, "Final costume? What is wrong with that excuse for a dress you are wearing?"

"Oh, my dear Professor. This is positively overdressed for the rumba," she stated emphatically. Another clever layer was removed, revealing a very low cut garment, which hugged her curves, barely covering her breasts, with delicate straps crossing her otherwise bare back and abdomen to join the lower half, which was little more than a bikini brief with a length of fringed trim swinging around her hips. With her wand, she transformed it into a vibrant, lime green with silver accents.

"Now, I need to adjust your costume." With another wave of her wand, his trousers became tight fitting and high waisted, emphasising his lean form. Unfortunately, also emphasising his choice of underwear and his obvious arousal. "Oh, dear. That will never do, you will have to remove them," she ordered, apparently not noticing the latter.

"What? Now you want me to dance in my undershorts?" he expostulated, shaking his head in embarrassment.

"No, no. I just need to make an adjustment. Stop being a baby and get those trousers off!"

Grumbling under his breath, the dumbfounded professor obeyed his imperious student. Standing with his head bowed, hair across his face, he sensed her stalking around him, studying his loose, tented, black boxers. Trying to ignore his body's response to her state of undress, he didn't notice her wand until it was pointed at his groin. "What are you...?"

Suddenly, he felt even more exposed. She had transfigured his boxers to a tight-fitting lycra scrap that barely covered him. What's more, she was blatantly admiring his package.

"Do you mind?" he asked, unsure whether to be offended or gratified by her appraisal.

"Not at all," she retorted without shame. "That will look much better under those pants."

He gestured to his own tumescent form. "I'm sure it will. How do you think I can hide *that* under those tight pants, given that it is unlikely to behave in a civilised manner while we are doing *that* dance, with you in *that* scrap of clothing?" He moaned inwardly as he realised he was discussing his *erection* with a nineteen-year-old witch. A student. A friend. One whom he had guiltily fantasised about for weeks.

"Well, Severus," she drawled, deliberately using his given name for the first time. "I would have thought you would be proud to display that fine set of assets. It's not as if anyone would recognise you, masked and in that outfit, so there is no need to worry about your senior students' female or male wanting to pounce on you in the corridors later. She chuckled at his outraged look at the thought, then let him off the hook. "Besides, that firm brief will hold *things* in check better than boxers, and with black pants and the subdued lighting, the only person that will notice is me." Almost purring, she added, "And I will certainly hold nothing against you for it."

At that, he strode over to her and clasped her tightly to him, lifting her leg around his hips, then performing the last move of their rumba, deliberately prolonging her slide down his body until her centre rested against his flimsily clad erection. Holding the pose, he lifted an eyebrow in a provocative smirk as their bodies remained in intimate contact. "Are you sure about that?"

Hermione was afire with the pressure of his hardness against the most sensitive part of her body, her nipples hardening in response, which was clearly evident in the form-fitting lycra. Snape smirked as she in turn flushed a little while regaining her balance.

"Now, do you understand what I mean?" he asked quietly.

"I concede that it may cause some... reaction. But the whole point is to embarrass Dumbledore thoroughly, is it not?" She grinned playfully, once again casting her gaze the length of his nearly naked body before focussing on his unflagging arousal. "However, I suggest you put those pants back on now, or it won't be any other seventh years you will have to worry about dragging you off to a dark corner to have their way with you."

He grinned wickedly as he swiftly pulled on his pants and fastened a few lower buttons on his shirt. "What did you have planned for the masks?" he inquired, returning the conversation to some semblance of normality, despite the simmering tension between them.

"Well, yours, of course, will have to cover that prodigious appendage on your face, and I think you should tie your hair back as well. That should alter your appearance enough. That, along with the clothes and the fact that you will be dancing, and *smiling*, something Professor Snape would never be seen doing, should be enough to disguise your identity," she decided.

"Are you saying my nose is overly large?" he asked with a mock scowl.

"Well, *Severus*, you know what they say about noses and other parts of the male anatomy. I think I have just confirmed a pet theory of a lot of senior girls." At his look of alarm, she chuckled and added, "They were talking about Viktor Krum, you know."

"I suppose you would know," he muttered.

"No, actually, I wouldn't. I admit, I shared a few kisses with him in fourth year, but I was only fifteen, for Merlin's sake!"

"So... you haven't actually...?" He had to ask.

"Err... no, I haven't."

He could not hide the grin of satisfaction that lit his face. Or his surprise as she finally gathered all of her Gryffindor courage to reach up and pull his head down to meet hers. Their lips met with an almost audible crackle as the conflagration of long withheld desire consumed their thoughts and opened the door to the passion smouldering beneath. Her lips parted to allow him to taste of her sweetness, hitherto only imagined at night in his most private moments. Their tongues swept and explored, tangling in a bold dance of their own.

Breathing erratically, Severus pulled away. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean for this to happen," he gasped.

"Does that mean you did not want it to happen?" she asked disconsolately, her head lowered in disappointment.

"Never think that," he reassured as his finger tipped her chin up so he could meet her gaze. She could see the sincerity shining from the depths of his black eyes as he continued. "I did not set out to seduce you, but from that first time we met here, I have been falling under your spell. You, Hermione, have taught me more than how to dance. You have shown me the pleasure in simple things. Dancing with a beautiful woman, conversation with a like mind, reading in silent companionship... why people fall in love. I just don't want this to stop because I can't control myself."

His look of hope filled her with joy as she wrapped her arms around his waist. Kissing him feverishly, she chided. "You silly man. I have been wanting to do that for a long time, but I thought you weren't interested in me in that way. I know I fell for you weeks ago."

He sighed as all his hopes and dreams were fulfilled by the witch he had adored in silence for just as long. "Did you not realise that I would never let anyone into my quarters as I have done for you? I am an extremely private man, and you have shared my living room, my bathroom, and even undressed me, yet you thought I didn't care? Oh, Hermione." Kissing the top of her head gently, he bathed in the warmth of her regard for long moments until she raised her head and spoke.

"But what are we to do? I am still your student, even though I am nineteen and of legal majority age in both Wizarding and Muggle law. Won't we risk a lot of trouble if we are found out?" She looked anxiously at him whilst still holding him tightly.

"Wizarding law is a little different, my dear. There have been precedents set over the years for relationships between staff and students. Our own Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall are one such example, although their relationship did not last. With the ability to use Legilimency and Veritaserum to ensure truthfulness, the issue of

coercion or preferential treatment is nullified, and the low birth rate among wizarding folk means that any consensual relationship of consenting adults is to be encouraged. However, I suggest, for the sake of our little conspiracy, that we remain very discreet, especially until after the Yule Ball. That is, unless you want to forgo our plan?"

Hermione considered his words for several minutes. Remembering the depth of sadness she had seen on his face as he spoke of his experiences at Dumbledore's hands, she came to a decision. Their plot to embarrass the headmaster may have been flippantly conceived, but would provide a much-needed catharsis for Severus his way of breaking free from the old manipulator's puppet-strings. "No, I think we should proceed as planned. But maybe you would consider staying after we have finished our 'display' and dancing on as normal, to be unmasked at midnight?"

"Would you really want to be seen to be with *me*? The great bat of the dungeons?" He still could not believe anyone would want to ally themselves and their reputation with him.

"My great bat of the dungeons," she said fondly, caressing his cheek with her fingertips, sending a renewed spark of desire to his groin. "Why wouldn't I be proud to be with such a sexy, intelligent, honourable wizard as Severus Snape?"

As he enfolded her once again in his arms, she had one more startling pronouncement.

"You realise that we shouldn't have sex until after the ball, don't you?" she stated matter-of-factly.

Groaning in frustration, he knew she was correct. Until they announced their relationship, it would not be right to carry out a sexual relationship, however discreet they may be. Spending time together dancing, reading, or talking was not the same as having a torrid affair beneath the noses of their superiors. He nodded his resigned agreement. Three more weeks of unquenched desire, never fully relieved by his own hand.

Those weeks were the longest in both Hermione's and Severus's lives. They spent as much time as possible together, limited by their need for secrecy. Even a friendship suspected between them could ruin their surprise at the ball. Limiting themselves to passionate kisses and sitting on his couch, entwined in each other's arms, made their dance sessions all the more stimulating. The day before the ball, after the final practice complete with costume changes, Severus slumped to the floor, head on his knees.

"What is it, my love?" Hermione knelt at his side and reached for his hand.

"Nothing. Just, that, I think if this continues any longer, I will be embarrassing myself with more than a mere erection at the ball."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Any more frustration and I will be coming in my pants like an overeager teenager," he told her bluntly, scowling at his, once again, bulging pants.

"Oh. Is that all? Why don't you just... you know... deal with it yourself beforehand?" She blushed as she spoke.

"Do you think I haven't already tried that?" he replied, despairing. "I brought myself to climax just minutes before meeting you here, and see what good that did?" He looked down.

Her cheeks red with a mixture of embarrassment and sudden desire at the thought of this man stroking himself to orgasm, she hesitantly suggested, "Would it help if I...?"

His face contorted as his hard won control lost the battle with his libido at her suggestion. A spreading dampness in the front of his pants was evidence of the result.

The young witch stared at his groin, heat licking at her own, demanding fulfilment. "Merlin, that was so..."

"Disgusting?" He sighed.

"Hot," she groaned. Reaching for his hand, she showed him how damp her knickers had become. "Touch me, Severus. I need you to make this ache go away."

He did as he was bid, sliding his fingers under the edge of her costume to find the heated depths beneath. A few strokes and she came undone, shuddering as she found her release at his touch.

They sat together on the floor of Dungeon Four, their bodies close and their thoughts joined. Knowing that after the ball the next evening, they would finally consummate their love in the most intimate dance of all.

The day of the ball dawned crisp and clear. The very air hummed with anticipation for the night's event. Junior students mooched around glumly, knowing they would be packed off to their dormitories after an early dinner and miss all the excitement. In the Gryffindor common room, Ron Weasley was working himself into a fine state over the expectation that he put into practice all he had been taught at dance lessons over the last three months.

"I can't do it. I know, I just can't do it. There is some sort of block between my ears and my feet. They just don't communicate," he ranted, causing his housemates to collapse into fits of laughter at his expression of abject terror for the night to come.

"Don't worry about it, Ron," reassured Harry. "One quick dance and then you can whisk Lavender off for a good snogging session. That will take her mind off dancing. Oi!" He rubbed his arm where Ginny, Hermione, and Lavender, who had just walked into the room, had all slapped him simultaneously.

"I'm sure you will be just fine, Ron," Hermione soothed. "Just take it slowly and relax."

"What would you know? You dodge the classes as much as possible and aren't even taking a partner. You won't have to dance!" Ron shouted.

"You may be surprised," was all Hermione had to say in response as she left the room.

"It's that mysterious Ravenclaw. I bet she is meeting him there," Ginny said.

"No, they are all accounted for. I also asked the Hufflepuffs. No-one is going alone from there either." Lavender frowned and added, "Surely her secret lover couldn't be a... Slytherin?"

At that, Neville looked up. With a startled expression, he covered his eyes, shuddered, and mouthed, *I don't want to know!*

As Hermione dressed for the evening's event in her silver ball gown, she smiled at her image in the mirror. The especially constructed gown was designed to fit and flow beautifully, despite the various layers beneath. She and Snape had decided that, as they were staying for the unmasking, there was no need to hide her identity. Only his would remain secret until midnight. Buckling her silver dance shoes over her otherwise bare feet, she shivered with the awareness of what she would be about to do next time she removed them. She had every intention of accompanying Severus down to his dungeon and carrying out her threat of having her wicked way with him. No longer was she prepared to wait for fulfilment. Her makeup complete and her hair swept off her face in a sophisticated knot of curls atop her head, she opened her top drawer and retrieved the small package she had received by owl that morning. Taking the engraved, heart-shaped silver locket out, she pressed her lips to it and fastened it around her neck. The final touch was the elegant, silver half-mask, with the red, feathered trim that she magically fit to her face. She was ready.

The gasps of appreciation that greeted her as she entered the common room told her that she was looking her best.

"Hmm. For someone who is attending this "silly dance" unescorted, you have sure made an effort to dress up," noted Ginny suspiciously.

"No need to let the House down by appearing scruffy," she countered and grinned. Ginny looked fabulous in a slinky deep blue gown that complemented her rich hair colour exquisitely. Likewise, the boys all looked very dapper in their best dress robes, even Ron rising to the occasion with some very stylish robes borrowed from George.

"Right, Gryffindors. Time to knock their socks off!" declared Harry as he led his friends out into the corridor.

The Great Hall was, for once, decorated in a sophisticated manner, unlike Dumbledore's usual garish efforts. Obviously, someone else had taken charge of the transformation on this occasion, with Dumbledore occupied instructing the band, at length, on his choice of music. Tables with snowy cloths were scattered around the perimeter of the Hall with a long table at the end of the room holding punch, glasses, and canapés. The lighting was, as she had expected, subdued, with myriads of candles hovering above their heads, charmed so no wax fell upon their clothes. A large Christmas tree, magnificently decorated, stood in one corner, and sprigs of mistletoe could be seen lurking in various likely locations. The overall effect was enchanting, generating gasps of pleasure from the students as they entered.

As the music started and the dancing began, Hermione found herself a quiet corner from which to observe the proceedings. Soon after, she felt warm fingertips caressing her shoulder. Leaning into him, as it could only be her dark-haired swain, she heard a soft rumble in her ear. "You look divine tonight, my sweet temptress." Turning her head swiftly, she found he had melted into the darkness as silently as he had appeared. Disappointed, she looked up to find Neville watching her closely from across the room, his expression an odd blend of dismay and awe. Placing a finger to her lips, she flashed him a conspiratorial grin, to which he responded with a weak smile and a nod. He certainly wasn't planning on interfering.

Finally, she heard a change in the music to the slow strains of a modern waltz. The students on the floor started murmuring and parted as a tall wizard, clad in a flowing, red satin-lined cape and tuxedo, dark hair tied back in a dashing queue, black mask covering his eyes and nose, made his way across the floor towards the beautiful woman in the silver dress. He swept up to her, bowed elegantly, kissed her hand lightly, and softly asked, "My lady?"

She curtsied with equal decorum, took his hand, and twirled out away from him, causing her diaphanous silver skirt to float out gracefully. Spinning back into dance hold, they immediately began a display of waltzing that left Albus Dumbledore speechless. After several intricate weaves and smooth turns, the music changed into the pulsing, insistent beat of the tango. With a flick, the wizard's jacket and tie followed his cape into the gathering crowd, as did her outer skirt. Now, both dressed in red and black, their joined bodies moved around the room in a fiery performance of skill and passion.

Neville sat heavily on the nearest chair, his eyes fixed on the couple who commanded the dance floor. "Dancing, it was all about the dancing," he muttered to himself in a relieved tone.

As the students applauded the final dip of the tango, the music became lively and fast. A further costume change by Hermione revealed her brief, fringed dress as the pair launched into a lively rendition of the jive. Everyone clapped in time with the music as their classmate twisted and spun in an impossible sequence of movements and kicks with her mysterious partner, whose wide smile showed his enjoyment of the dance. Ron turned to Harry. "But she was *hopeless* at dancing. She was the only one worse than me," he wailed. Harry just grinned, enjoying the display.

Suddenly, the band slowed and started playing a sensual, evocative melody. The unknown wizard's shirt loosened, undone to his lower chest, and his pants transformed, revealing a lean form envied by most of the boys present and openly admired by the girls. Hermione's costume change into the skimpy, lime number was met with gasps from the onlookers. Headmaster Dumbledore paled and poured himself another stiff drink. Harry and Ron stared in disbelief while Ginny applauded enthusiastically. "I don't know who he is, but he is *hot!*" she enthused. Both her brother and her boyfriend shot her disapproving looks. "But he is!" She pouted.

Severus smiled as he commenced the opening moves of their rumba routine. From behind Hermione, he caressed her face, continuing the movement of his hands down her neck, the sides of her breasts and to her hips as she swayed to the music, arms at her side. Spinning her into his arms, he kept his eyes locked on hers, the audience forgotten as he led her through a complex routine of sensuous body movements and spins. Her pupils dilated as she brushed against his body and felt his growing arousal, their concentration focussed on the almost palpable sexual tension surrounding them.

"Not just the dancing, then," whispered Neville, to no-one in particular, as he watched their highly erotic dance. The staff were transfixed, Dumbledore as caught up as the rest with the aura of blatant sexuality exuding from the dance floor.

The music drawing to a climax, Hermione positioned herself behind her wizard for her final sequence. Smirking to herself, she let her hands trail down his body rather than his arms, mimicking his actions at the start. However, instead of stopping at his hips, she deliberately and obviously caressed his burgeoning erection as her hand passed by before continuing her planned spin away from him.

As she spun back, he whispered, "Temptress, you will regret that," and thrust into her slightly as she placed her leg around his hip and leaned back. Lifting her high, he once again slowly and teasingly slid her down the length of his body, ensuring that every inch of her felt his desire. Positioning her now moist centre against his, he writhed against her in time with the music as she gracefully performed her final arch. Her flushed face as she returned to his arms demonstrated the effectiveness of his revenge. Together, they turned to the crowd and bowed, and then Severus swept her into his arms for a long, passionate kiss. The students cheered, Neville sank his head onto his arms, and Headmaster Albus Dumbledore fainted.

"I think that had the desired effect," murmured Severus as the co-conspirators watched Minerva McGonagall rousing Dumbledore with a *Renervate*. Mobbed by incredulous teenagers, they made their way to the drinks table for much-needed refreshment amidst a flurry of questions.

"That was amazing. How did you learn to dance like that?"

"Can you teach me?"

"Where did you meet him?"

"Who is he?" hissed Ginny, dragging Hermione to one side. "And why doesn't he speak?"

Her friend simply smiled smugly and went to rescue her wizard from the crowd of admiring fans. As the music continued, they danced more sedately, the heat of their desire never far from the surface, content with the knowledge that they would be sated before the night was over. Eventually, as they provided no more displays of wanton seductiveness, everyone returned to their own business of making headway on their date for the night, progress enhanced by the pheromones rich in the air. Skillfully avoiding inquisitive approaches made by the staff on behalf of an awake, but bemused, headmaster, they danced around the room, eyes only for each other; their love plain for all to see.

At precisely midnight the band stopped playing, and Dumbledore, having regained his composure, stepped up to the podium. "Thank you all for attending this wonderful evening. Your dancing was delightful, some more than others. I would like to thank Miss Granger and her partner for a fabulous display. I only wish that I had known of her talent; I would have asked her to instruct you all. Now, it is time for the unmasking. On the count of three. One..."

"Well, at least he was gracious in defeat," whispered Hermione, squeezing her wizard's hand. "Are you ready for this?"

"As ready as I will ever be," he replied, fiddling with the pocket of his pants.

"Three!" shouted Dumbledore amid cheers as everyone threw their masks into the air.

The noise suddenly quietened as Hermione's mystery man was finally revealed. His distinctive nose and black eyes revealed to all his true identity, despite his red shirt and faint smile. Professor Severus Snape bowed to all, his eyes glinting with mischief as he turned to his witch and, to her surprise, handed her a drink. She took it with a questioning glance.

"Just thought you may need fortification," he murmured, indicating the approach of the headmaster.

"Thanks," she replied after taking several deep swallows of the definitely spiked punch. Frowning at the gentle clink in the glass as she set it down, she investigated. "Severus? Is this what I think it is?" she asked, holding up a delicately filigreed silver and emerald ring.

"Well, you are the know-it-all in this relationship," he replied with a smirk. "What do you think it is?"

Several girls in the surrounding crowd sighed as they caught a glimpse of the object under discussion.

"Oh, Severus. Yes. A thousand times, yes!" She grasped her wizard by his shirt and let her lips confirm her words in a fiery kiss. "I love you," she whispered as she finally pulled away.

"As I love you, my sweet temptress," he replied, heedless of the gathered onlookers, who were treated to the extraordinary sight of the dour Potions master smiling tenderly at their classmate as he slid the ring onto her left hand. As the deafening applause from both students and staff settled, she embraced him and whispered something into his ear.

The students had never seen Professor Snape move with such alacrity. As he hurried out of the Great Hall, Neville asked loudly, "What did you say to him, Hermione?"

She turned and replied candidly as she walked away, smiling lasciviously. "I just told him that if he wasn't on his bed, naked, in seven minutes, I was starting without him."

Albus Dumbledore fainted. Again.

A/N: Hugs and kisses to the wonderful ladyinthecloak, whose help and advice are always unparalleled, and rdholmantx, who stops me getting too Hufflepuffy.

Prompt 9: Dance the Night Away: Ah, Voldie's dead. It's time for a Yule Ball to celebrate. What goes on?