

# Last Tango in Hogwarts

*by Siryanne*

The Christmas Ball. Hermione and Severus have been together for a year now. Hermione wants everybody to know, but Severus disagrees, and she doesn't understand why. Some things cannot be explained. Some things cannot be controlled...

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 3*

The Christmas Ball. Hermione and Severus have been together for a year now. Hermione wants everybody to know, but Severus disagrees, and she doesn't understand why. Some things cannot be explained. Some things cannot be controlled...

*Hi! My first fiction in English! Ha, yes, I'm French, and even if I understand almost perfectly English, I have some difficulties to speak it... well, ok, GREAT difficulties! Fortunately, my dear Severusgirl (who wrote the wonderful "Twenty Four Little Hours") has accepted to correct the numerous mistakes I did in this translation of one of my French fiction. (For those who would be interested, the original title is "Dernier tango à Poudlard")*

*There is three chapters. The first and the second are rather short, but the third is much more long. It was an answer to the Christmas Challenge of HRFRHO (the French WIKTT) . We had to write a one shot or a short fiction (max. 3 chapters) where Hermione and Severus would get together (or confess to the others that they are together) during Christmas.*

*NB: This note has not been corrected by Severusgirl, because I want you to see how hazardous is my English and how the work she did is wonderful! Lol!*

*Oh, last thing: at the beginning of this story, Hermione is 17. Please don't hit me!!! In the wizard world, she is an adult at 17! :-)*

---

### Last Tango in Hogwarts

#### Chapter 1

The Christmas Ball. I had looked forward to it for months. Since June in fact. Since we had made this bet he was sure to win. But he had lost. Of course, he had tried to renege on the deal then. But it was a magical bet: no chance to slope off, no, no. I had reminded him of it a good hundred times as I gloated and teased him about his bad mood and my triumph. But, today, I wish these stupid rules hadn't existed. I wish I had listened to him, for once...

Our story had begun the previous Christmas Eve. No Ball this time, no--Hogwarts was almost empty. The only unlucky ones (or lucky one, in my case) who had stayed were Harry (of course), the whole Weasley clique, five or six Ravenclaws whom I didn't know, Hannah Abbott and another Hufflepuff, and a large number of staff.

We had eaten together and talked about everything and nothing. Well, someone talked less than the others... guess who? Yet I had tried several times to draw him out. I had questioned him on... well, everything and nothing... which had certainly been a mistake. He was not the kind of man to be interested by a seventeen-year-old's childish nonsense. Even if this child was one of the best pupils he had had in fifteen years. Modesty put aside...

It had already been few months since I had developed... let's say a certain attraction to him. Then a ghost of feelings for him. Incredible? Incomprehensible? Maybe, but it was true. Some things cannot be explained, cannot be controlled. Anyway, I had no desire to control them. It was the first time in my life I had felt this kind of thing. Nothing like my flirtation with Viktor, which was a (rather fruitful) attempt to arouse Ron's jealousy.

Ron... Nothing much there, either. Nothing really serious. Nothing more than a little girl fling. No real feelings for either boy. But for this man...

Love? I couldn't have said that at this time. But a desire... an irrepressible desire to be with him, to be his, to discover him, to let him discover me. A desire to love him, yes... And a desire *for* him. Some things cannot be explained, cannot be controlled.

So, that evening, I had decided to go for broke. I could no longer bear to feel guilty because of this attraction, to try and hide it. If anything was possible, I wanted to take my chance. I wanted to live this "anything." I wanted to live.

I had noted the sidelong glances he gave me during Potions classes, remarks becoming rarer and less acerbic. Once, he had ~~had~~ *most* congratulated me. "Decent, Miss Granger. As always..." I had nearly wept for joy...

Of course I put my impressions down to a self-delusion, reading more into it than was there. I suspect it was hardly possible that a respectable thirty-seven-year-old man could have designs on one of his pupils and show it. But someone told me once that hope springs eternal.

Why *that* evening? I don't know. I think I had felt that, had I not dared that evening--where we were half out the teacher-pupil framework--I would ~~never~~ dare. Oh, warning, I didn't try to seduce him, far from it! Not in front of everybody. Anyway, I wouldn't have known how to do it ... In fact, I had somehow groped my way. I had planned to talk to him and to see where this chat would lead us... hoping it would be in the park or some more intimate place... um... I wished to let him know what I desired, but I didn't know how to do it.

His lack of reaction had immediately discouraged me. I had thought I was stupid. How could I have expected anything else than scorn from the big devil Snape? However, I couldn't bear him a grudge for that. One can't change in hour a character skillfully constructed over fifteen years or more. But I was disappointed. I had left the nice dinner before everybody. I had apologized and said I was exhausted. Depressed, instead! I had indeed deluded myself. Sidelong glances? Were they really for me and not for Parvati or Lavender behind me? Less remarks? It was less interest in my work! You stupid Gryffindor!

I had said that out loud. And I had started when I had heard a voice answer me *His* voice.

"I could not have said it better."

"Professor Snape?"

I had let the indirect insult go, as I was too surprised by his presence. He must have left the dinner just after me and had followed me... *followed* me?

"No. Just this once, it is Severus."

I hadn't realised how close he was to me. Very close. Much closer than propriety allowed. I hadn't understood what he meant. Was he allowing me to call him by his first name? Or was it a trap?

"You have run away very quickly, Hermione. Did the meal displease you? Or was it the music? Or maybe the company?"

Every step he had taken towards me obliged me to move back the same number of steps. I had eventually found myself with my back against the wall. A sort of tiny smile had curled up his lips, but it was not the sarcastic, petty smile he usually gave to his students. This one was different... Jubilation? Yes, he was playing, and it seemed to me that he enjoyed it. I didn't know precisely what the game was, though. Well, to be exact, I had an idea, but I couldn't believe it.

He had moved even closer until our bodies were less than one inch apart. I had smelt jasmine and coriander mixed with something like Nape. A potion. He had prepared a potion that day. This man never stopped working! Well, OK, that is the pot calling the kettle black!

I had to lift my head to look him in the eyes. His were lowered to mine.

My whole body was shuddering, but my brain was paralysed. Why was he so close to me? Why was he looking at me that way? And why had I become mute?!

"You do not reply? What is it? You seem embarrassed. Oh, maybe I am too close. Does it upset you? Still, you had at last seemed to attempt a reconciliation at the dinner..."

"At last?"

I had been highly surprised to have managed to articulate two words one after the other. Had he said "at last"? Did it mean that he expected it? That he ~~wished~~ it?

"Do you think I am blind, Hermione? Did you think I saw nothing? You probably believe that a very few women have... behaved in such a way with me. I have to admit that it's true. But that doesn't prevent me from recognizing unmistakable signs, my dear."

Half an inch... I swallowed with difficulty, hoping the sound produced had not been as loud as I thought.

"Such as?"

"Such as your glances, your blushes, your stammering. So many things that were not like you. Oh, at the beginning, I thought I was imagining these things. Then I thought it was one of your stupid Gryffindor pranks. But I finally felt it."

Had I shown such a lack of discretion? Possibly. But could I regret it now? It was neither a dream nor my imagination. I was in a corridor, stuck between a wall and a Severus Snape, and one of these two seemed very interested in what I felt (physically, in any case) for him. And it was not the one made of stone... Well, I knew now that at least one of them was not made of it...

This time, my shaking voice had managed to form three words, which was a feat in itself.

"Finally felt what?"

He had filled the last tiny space that separated us, and I felt his torso press gently against my breasts through the fabric of our robes. He had put his hands on the wall on both sides of my head, as he bent slightly in order to whisper in my ear, making me shiver with... with everything...

"Your emotion. I felt your thrills whenever we brushed against each other, every time I bent over you to check your cauldron. I smelt this very particular odour: your excitement. It oozed from every pore of your skin. It fluttered in the air with every breath you took. I have to admit I was surprised. But not unpleasantly, Hermione, not unpleasantly..."

His mouth had then moved down to my ear lobe, and his lips had sucked it for just a second. But that had been enough for me to let out a long sigh. He had straightened up and had continued looking at me with this almost arrogant little smile. I didn't know what to think. He had just told me it. He had just told me and shown me that the attraction was mutual. But I didn't know what to do, what to say. This is what happens when you're unprepared!

So I had found myself utterly inane in front of him, still not daring believe what was happening and not knowing how to react. But fortunately, he spoke first.

"I fear I have behaved like a bore this evening. I apologize; it's always difficult for me to adopt a sociable demeanor towards people used to seeing me as an awful anti-social. And besides... I must confess that I have enjoyed torturing you like this..."

Oh, had the reward been such every time, I would have been ready to endure tortures a thousand times worse...

"Now I am perfectly well disposed to undertake a conversation with you for as long as you wish, Hermione. But this place seems a little inappropriate. What about my quarters?"

"I... Professor..."

"Severus."

"Sev... Severus... You... Are you saying..."

"That the attraction is reciprocated? Yes, you are very shrewd, Miss Granger. You can understand as well that my attraction is not limited to the physical, but that it also extends to your extraordinary personality. Even if I have had no proof of its existence for a good five minutes... Perhaps something is disturbing you?"

He had pressed me further against the wall. His smile had broadened and I had managed with superhuman effort to smile him back. I was trembling with joy, with excitement... and with a little fear too, yes. Because I knew that if I followed him in his quarters, long and fascinating as our conversation would be, sooner or later it would end how I had imagined a thousand times in my fantasies. And that I had never experienced...

I had nodded, and as I slipped my arms around his neck, I stood on tiptoe and kissed him very softly. He had responded with a gracefulness I could never have expected from him.

A few minutes later, I followed him into his rooms, and the night had passed and ended as I had thought it would. Except it has been a thousand times better than in my fantasies...

TBC...

oOo\$Oo

---

*I fear that chapter 2 won't come before the end of next week, because I've lost the final version (the one corrected) !!! So I have to do it again, and to find the motivation to do this long and painful job (yes, painful!!lol)...*

*Severusgirl, if you see this, thank you so so much again for your great job!*

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 3*

The Christmas Ball. Hermione and Severus have been together for a year now. Hermione wants everybody to know, but Severus disagrees, and she doesn't understand why. Some things cannot be explained. Some things cannot be controlled...

---

*Hi! Here is chapter 2, I hope you'll enjoy :)*

Thanks to my lovely beta readers Severusgirl and ABlack, and also to notsosaintly!

---

### Chapter Two

Of course, our relationship remained secret. I was a sixth-year student and, until my 18th birthday in the following September, even if I was of age in the wizard world, I was underage in the Muggle one. Besides, he was my teacher and was more than twenty years older than me. According to him, it was as inadmissible in the wizard world as it may be in the Muggle world. He said people wouldn't understand, particularly as it was him... he who changed sides fifteen years ago and who still aroused suspicions....

He said he was risking his career, I my future, and we our relationship. I knew he was right. But... after a few months, it began to take its toll. I couldn't stand anymore to be obliged to see him secretly at night, to behave as if nothing was happening during lessons, to pretend to hate him in front of Harry and Ron. I had believed I could feel alive with him, and did in private, but the constraint of concealment killed me the rest of the time. And I was afraid *it* would kill our relationship, more than people's looks and words might do.

First, I didn't tell him how it was affecting me, but I'm sure he knew it. He could see my passive behaviour at school; he could see my plate remaining almost full during meals. But he didn't talk about it. We had made our decision at the beginning, and it was a decision we had to stick to for as long as I remained at Hogwarts. Then, we would have to pretend our relationship was a recent one. We would have to lie... build our life on a lie....

I couldn't accept that, but I thought it was no use fighting. I loved him, he loved me, we loved each other, and we were the only ones to know it. I had to content myself with this.

Well, *that* was what the Gryffindor Hermione thought... But the Slytherin Hermione, who was born under her shady partner's influence, looked at things differently. *She* pushed me to suggest this bet; *she*, this innocently calculating, cunning part of me which had lain quietly dormant for years, waiting for her prince's kiss.

The stake was simple. If I lose, our relationship would remain secret. If I won, we would make it public. But not just at any time: Christmas, for our first anniversary, in front of everybody; whether there were ten or one hundred. As for Severus, he had to choose the terms of the bet, and I *knew* that would convince him to agree because I knew

what he was going to propose and that he would be certain to win. I just had to make sure that I didn't make a mistake and hope that I knew him as well as I thought I did.

"If Longbottom gets an 'Acceptable' on the last Potions test next week, you win."

Did I say 'well'? I knew him inside out....

I had demanded the right to see Neville's completed exam paper and potion, and then the deal had been clinched. Severus displayed that arrogant smile I hadn't seen for almost six months. But there was something he didn't know: a few weeks earlier, Neville had asked me for help in my favorite professor's subject; since then, I had helped him almost every day to memorize the properties of various ingredients and to stick to the recipe.

We had used Moaning Myrtle's bathroom as a makeshift laboratory. It had been more than laborious at the beginning, but the result was more than satisfying, and there was every chance that I might win the bet. All I had to do was to hope that my emotional fellow wouldn't be too perturbed by my cold partner during this last assessment of the year.

Finally, my efforts had been rewarded. Severus, with his Slytherin slyness, had really tried to resist, but my arguments had defeated him and he had been obliged to grant Neville a good 'Acceptable'. Though, in my opinion, he deserved an 'Excellent'. But I couldn't quibble. I already had to distract my incredulous lover by saying some things couldn't be explained, before he could think about it too hard and realize Neville had had help. And that other things couldn't be controlled, like the sudden desire I had felt for him then... Slytherin Hermione....

So, then, he had tried to wriggle out of it and to act as though the bet had never existed, but it was impossible, and he knew it as well as me. I think that he just protested out of principle. I was simply happy. I knew there were six months left before we could announce our news, but it seemed to me like six days, now that I was sure it would be done. And as a matter of fact, it really went by like six days. Very quickly, maybe too quickly for me to make the most of it. But I was fine, simply fine, and even if Severus kept grumbling, he saw that I felt better. When all is said and done, I'm sure he was pleased to see me like that.

With these passing 'day-months', our relationship became stronger, more united, though it only existed by night. So, it was only with happiness that I could imagine how it would be after Christmas.

By the way, I had heard that there would be a Ball at Christmas. More than half the school would be there. I was bursting with joy. Severus was crestfallen. The more D-Day was approaching, the more I could feel his tension rise. On the day before the great evening, we had a discussion on the subject.

"Come on, Sev, please relax! You're going to give me your stress!"

"Oh, forgive me for fearing the moment when I shall have to tell the whole of Hogwarts I have been sleeping with a student for one year!"

"Of course, if you say it that way... Perhaps we could avoid the 'sleeping with' angle and talk about love instead? Don't you think it would go over better?"

"Grrmbglrblgrl."

"Oh, right, I'm just teasing you! Severus, it will be all right... There's no reason it won't."

"We already talked about that a hundred times, Hermione! There is no reason it will! I am your teacher, I am far older than you, and I am a former Death Eater... Well, for all those people, I am not the perfect man for a girl... woman, excuse me, of your age!"

"You are in my eyes, and that is all that matters. Maybe they will have difficulties understanding it, maybe some of them won't be able to accept it, I know that too well, but those people are not important."

"So why are you so bloody keen to let them know?"

"Because there are other people, my love, who *will* understand. I'm talking of people like Molly and Arthur Weasley, like Remus Lupin, who--contrary to what this growl has just insinuated--are really extraordinary and open-minded people. I've only named three people but I could refer to three hundred. Three thousand. Come on, three million! Well, for the first evening, I haven't got delusions of grandeur; we will content ourselves with thirty! Ah, you see, you can smile! Severus... my love... I love you, and I want everybody to know it."

"Hermione, my dear, I love you, but I persist in saying that is a mistake. What if it goes wrong?"

"I repeat to you, it w..."

"Imagine!"

"Well, we will face it together! And you'll get the satisfaction of having been right since the beginning...."

"That is not funny, Hermione. I am... Right, the fact is that I am afraid for you!"

"Afraid? Why?"

"You don't know how it is... accusing looks from people. I am used to it; they expect nothing good from me. But you... The whole community pins its hopes on you. You are known as one of the most brilliant pupils Hogwarts has ever trained! If they come to know... when they know, they will judge you, they will reject you, and they will treat you as less than nothing. I just can see that! *Oh, the Granger girl! She had such a promising future, but she teamed up with that awful former Death Eater! Merlin, what a decline, I would have never expected that of her!* Well, you know what I mean...."

"I see above all that you can do a very good impersonation of a gossip, but that aside... Oh, Severus, you dramatize everything! I swear it will be nothing like that! You may have met terrible, bad people in your life, but don't make generalities. People are not all the same; some are really good."

"Good? So good that they will say I must have drugged you or given you a love potion to drink! Frankly, Hermione, look at you! And look at me! They will never believe that..."

"Yet it's the case, isn't it? I have needed no love potion or drug to fall in love with you, Severus. Nor to fancy you. Those who don't understand are not those I would call good people! The good ones might be surprised, but only because of our age difference, and they'll get used to it! Stop belittling yourself; it doesn't suit you!"

"All the same, I have always wondered what attracted you to me. I had noted it at the time, but I have never understood why."

"There are some things..."

"That cannot be explained, yes, I know. And others that can't be controlled, that's right?"

"Indeed. Except that for once, I can try to explain you. What did attract me to you? Everything. Your intelligence, your sharp mind, your charisma..."

"I was referring to physical observations..."

"I'm coming to that. The velvet of your voice that made me shiver with each word that escaped your sweet mouth. The fineness of your hands, whose touch I longed for. The depth of your eyes, in which I could have drowned, feeling only delight and sensual pleasure..."

"Such poetry!"

"I'm trying to put myself on your level."

"Waste of time; I am matchless."

"Hey, you're spoiling my slushy moment!"

"Hahaha!" I could have added his laugh to my list, so rare, but so frank that it made me shiver from the inside. "Okay, I take your point! I believe you, I believe you, there is no need to flatter me that much! Aaaah... Hermione... My sweet, my beautiful Hermione, I could bless the Heavens every day for allowing Beauty's eyes to rest favourably on a Beast such as I." <sup>(1)</sup>

"Matchless, eh?"

"I was joking! Well, so as to come back to our subject... Okay... I trust you... Anyway, I have no choice! But if it turns wrong, don't say I did not warn you!"

"What could be worse than having to hide ourselves for another six long months and having to lie to everybody? My friends, my family... I won't be able to."

"I know, I know... But... I have a foreboding... which is far worse than what people will think."

"You should not. Come on, stop thinking about it until tomorrow. Oh, I think something is going to take your mind off things; yes, I think that one of these uncontrollable things is surfacing... oh yes, yes, that's right!"

"Oh, don't try to control it then!"

"Mmmh, Severus... You know, I think that my only drug is you...."

"This poetry suits you better. And I really like it...."

We made love all night, sometimes tenderly, sometimes... more savagely, yes, but each time passionately. With our bodies, our hearts and our souls. As though it could be the last time....

The morning of December 25th had found us asleep in his bed, lovingly embraced, happy. In a year, it was the first time I had stayed the whole night. I usually crept back to my room in the middle of the night, and it took me hours to fall asleep in a big, cold bed so I slept little. There, feeling this heat, and the softness of his body against mine... that was the best Christmas present he could have given me. Oh, except for tonight's declaration, of course.

It was then that I realised that I had no gift for him, and I apologised as soon as he awoke.

"My gift, Hermione, is you."

All right, he was matchless...

*TBC....*

-----  
<sup>(1)</sup> This beautiful expression is property of Severusgirl :) . I couldn't find a way to translate what I had written in the French version, and that is what she suggested. It's nicer than the original version :)

## Chapter 3

### *Chapter 3 of 3*

The Christmas Ball. Hermione and Severus have been together for a year now. Hermione wants everybody to know, but Severus disagrees, and she doesn't understand why. Some things cannot be explained. Some things cannot be controlled...

---

*I apologize for the delay! My previous beta reader, ABlack, had problems with her computer (or her connexion). I have had no news for weeks, so I finally asked Victoria (I love yooooou! Lol), who has already corrected "Death Looks so Good on You", to do it, and she has been wonderfully quick! This is the last chapter.*

---

### Chapter 3

The day had gone by very quickly, maybe because we had stayed in bed until midday. I had left the dungeons discreetly and had gone directly to meet my friends in the Great Hall. None of them seemed surprised by my morning absence at Hogsmeade. I suspected they knew more than they let show. Especially Ginny. Or they had merely not noticed my absence, which would have been rather frustrating, come to think of it.

I had spent the afternoon preparing myself for the ball with the younger Weasley. Would I surprise anyone if I said that I had decided to wear a long black dress? It was a backless dress, split to mid-thigh on the left side. Like my soon to be official partner, I had never found myself attractive, but when I saw my reflection in the mirror, wearing this outfit, I had thought perhaps I may have underestimated myself. And the admiring whistle from my friend, whose turquoise silk dress suited wonderfully, had not belied this statement. I had put my hair up in a bun and let some strands escape, but I had not smoothed it down. Despite all the times he had made fun of me about it, Severus really loved the indomitable nature of my hair. A light touch of make up and I was ready for this night, which looked as though it would be exceptional.

We were supposed to meet the boys in the Great Hall at seven o'clock. Like the majority of the girls who were present that evening, we took great care to arrive a good fifteen minutes late. Ginny was Harry's partner for the ball. It had taken five long years for my friend to notice the beauty of the little red-haired girl and to realize that they seemed to be made for each other. They had been together one short month, and their brand new happiness made me glad. And they also made me secretly jealous,

because *they* could live their love before everyone's eyes.

As for Ron, he seemed to have utterly forgotten me and was now living love's dream with Luna since last September. I had always thought she would end up with Neville. But, I was happy for them too. They were both really cute together. And they were similar on many points, now that I'm thinking about it.

None of my three best friends knew I was not single, or at least, if they suspected, they didn't know that the mysterious man was part of Hogwarts. Despite all I had said to Severus, I couldn't help fearing their reaction just a little. I could already imagine Ginny glaring at me with a look of disgust, Ron becoming very red and running to the nearest toilet, and Harry...

Harry... He, who in six and a half years, had never been able to recognize that Severus was a fair man, and kept considering him as a 'greasy-haired bastard'. I preferred not to think about it. I thought they would get used to it, all of them. Since they loved me, they would get used to it. They would understand.

So we made our entrance - me, Ginny, Luna, Parvati, Padma, Lavender and a great number of sixth and seventh years - around a quarter past seven. The first thing we saw after entering was the decorations. They were absolutely sublime. It was surely Professor Flitwick's work. A single table was set all along the room. A shimmering tablecloth covered it; depending on the place from which we looked at it, its sheen could represent the colors of each house. From here, it was red. If I bent a little, it was green. It was Christmas evening, and it was the duty of the four Houses to be reunited. Multicolored pieces of tinsel started from the corners of the room and then tangled in the chandeliers, which fluttered a few meters from the ground. Some wispy little angels flew lightly here and there. In the background, a gigantic fir, decorated with a thousand pieces of tinsel and balls, stood proudly towards the sky - well, the ceiling. But if you looked up, you could see the sky. It was snowing that evening.

The second thing we noted was the orchestra, which was settled on the platform usually reserved for the teachers' table. It was composed of almost all the Muggle instruments I knew. I had wondered if they planned to play all of them at the same time; if they did, I was curious to hear a cello accompanied with drums. But we would have time to take an interest in music later.

The third thing had been much more interesting at that moment. The men. Rather, the boys, for the most part, but in my case: the man. We saw immediately that all of the Hogwarts' males had donned Muggle suits, far from the usual (but beautiful) wizard dress. I glanced quickly at the assembly, taking barely two seconds to gratify Harry and Ron with an admiring smile (these outfits suited them wonderfully), and then I found him, in the background, next to the fir, looking sullen and a bit uncomfortable.

It took my breath away. He was just astounding. I had never seen him dressed any way but in his robes or, in some cases, without his robes, which was quite marvelous too. But there... black trousers, black jacket, grey shirt, black tie. Well, you couldn't ask too much of him as to regard color, of course, but he was wonderful. Beautiful. Perfect. I had always thought a suit could change a man. I had never realized how much it did.

A black angel, come down from heaven for Christmas night. Giving up his immortality for me. Indeed, it was approximately what was going to happen. That evening, the Severus Snape that everyone knew - or believed they knew - was to disappear, and to be born again in the form of a new man - the one I knew. At least, I hoped so.

I stopped myself from running towards him. Not right away. I knew the way I wanted everything to happen. So I just smiled broadly at him, and he answered with an examining look, which spoke volumes. Obviously, for him, a beautiful dress could change a woman, too.

There were about a hundred and fifty guests. Around half past seven, Professor Dumbledore had urged us to take a seat; teachers and students mingled naturally along the table. After one of the Headmaster's increasingly crazy speeches, the dinner began, and so had the conversation. There was no embarrassment between the teachers and us; we talked about almost everything, carefully avoiding the subject of homework, though. Some fell back on the various Quidditch tournaments, others on the current political situation. This subject was not a cause for argument here, contrary to my former world.

Severus had taken a seat rather far from me, and I had been amused to see him sitting next to Neville. The poor boy seemed paralyzed, and he doggedly kept his head turned towards Luna on his right. Several times I felt my lover's burning look on me - more precisely, on my rather bare bosom - but every time I tried to catch his eye, I came across a vacuum. He was faster than me. Or I was just deluding myself. Anyway, it didn't look like it was going to be easy.

We finished with dessert - that is to say, delicious Yule logs - around ten o'clock, and Dumbledore had declared the ball open. The table vanished, making space for an immense dance floor. The paving stones of the Great Hall had been magically replaced by a wooden floor.

The orchestra began to play quite rhythmical pieces. I had been relieved to see they knew at least a minimum about Muggle music, and that they did not mix all the instruments they had at their disposal, which would certainly have caused a monstrous cacophony. I had the first dance with Neville, who managed extremely well for such a usually clumsy boy. Perhaps my private lessons with him had given him more self-confidence.

A quick glance at Severus had shown me he was sitting on a chair, arms crossed, apparently in conversation with Professor Dumbledore - who I could have sworn just winked at me.

I then began some kind of waltz with Harry and ended it with Ron. My feet had suffered a little with the latter, but his sorry look had me laughing. I willingly gave him back to Luna, wishing her good luck, which earned me a light nudge from my wretched dancer friend.

I then had a break and took a drink, while wild rock 'n roll filled the room. I used this moment to look around for Severus, but was disconcerted to see him nowhere. For a moment, I feared he had left like a coward. Then, as it had done exactly one year ago, his voice made me jump. I had not heard him approach me.

"Having a good evening, Miss Granger?"

"Excellent, Professor. Nice food, nice music, nice company.... I have to say, you are looking really magnificent tonight."

"Oh, please, do not make fun of me! I suffocate in here. And I'm sure I look ridiculous!"

"You are perfect, Severus. And very sexy...."

"Really?"

"Mm-mm. By the way, on our wedding day, you will have to..."

"On our WHAT day?"

"I'm joking! But I would really like you to keep that suit. It gives me very interesting ideas."

"What should I say about your dress?"

"Do you like it?"

"Should we be in a more intimate place, I would have *avery interesting idea* on how to demonstrate that I do...."

"Professor Snape! Are you making advances at me?"

"It depends. Would you be receptive to it, Miss Granger?"

"Mmmh, maybe later... But for the moment, I remind you that you have a bet to honor, dear Professor, and you have only one and a half hours left."

"Oh, that's true! I was hoping you had forgotten. Well, it would have changed nothing. I would have been covered with pustules for ten years, wouldn't I?"

"No. You would have become impotent."

"WHAT?"

"I had to find something strong enough!"

"May I point out that you would have suffered because of it too, my dear ~~lover~~!"

"Not really. You know other ways to satisfy me. Well, maybe I would have missed it a bit, I agree, but I could have gone to see Ron ~~anybody~~ else...."

He stared at her blankly.

"I'm joking, ooooo! It would have been temporary, that's all! But a warning, if you eventually try to wriggle out of it, I shall have no mercy as to how long the spell would last!"

"I know someone who will be pitiless if I do not wriggle out of it."

"Severus, I don't want to talk about that again!"

"There is not only that. But if that is what you wish. What am I, in front of Gryffindor determination? Would you grant me a dance, Miss Granger?"

"With pleasure."

Chance or providence had got the orchestra to play a slow tune at this very moment. Severus had closed his hand on mine and passed an arm around my waist. I put my other hand on his shoulder. We were not really close, yet all eyes seemed to converge on us. I didn't care. I didn't see them. I also heard no more music, not really. It was just he. He, who was dancing with me in front of half the school. He, whose lips showed an almost imperceptible smile, but whose eyes told everything. He, who took me closer to him with every turn we made, until our feet had crossed and our bodies brushed each other. My arms were around his neck, and his were embracing my waist. I lay my head on his chest, and he rested his chin on it. We were tuning slowly, he defying the people staring at us, me defying time.

Time, which had passed both so quickly and so slowly. Time, which will take him away from me one day, I knew it very well. He was older than me. But at that moment, I joyfully sent time packing. Tonight it had no hold on us. Tonight we were both immortal.

I looked up at him with tearful eyes and, very slowly, as if to let me think about it a last time, he lowered his lips. He knew it was what I desired, and that there was nothing to be done about it. Some things could not be explained.

The closer our lips came, the more I could feel tension in the air. It didn't come from us. Nobody could believe what they were seeing. Everybody had stopped dancing, but the music continued. We were alone in the middle of the dance floor, and a circle had formed around us. It probably looked like the Inquisition Court for Severus. For me, it was just a crowd of curious people.

We kissed at last, provoking an exclamation of great surprise from the people around us, like when you are at the cinema and one of the characters gives you an extraordinary revelation. We finally stopped moving, like everybody else, and exchanged a passionate kiss. Severus seemed to have forgotten where he was, and me - I was passing him all my love and my happiness in our kiss. It had taken a few minutes for us to come down to earth. He looked around him then, fearing the sentence. A public lynching, perhaps....

But nothing happened. People kept looking at us, astounded. I looked for my friends. I had been happily surprised to see a tiny smile on Ginny's lips. She knew it, I was certain. Harry, beside her, had not been able to keep his chin off the floor, but seemed to be tense. Ginny knew, yes, and she had surely told him. He would need time to get used to it. As for Ron, he was nowhere to be seen. My earlier theory was right. He would need time, too.

Then I peered at the others, even though they were less important. Everyone seemed circumspect, highly surprised, a bit shocked, but no one had a really negative reaction. They were just stunned. I looked at Severus as if to say 'I told you!' but his look, even if it was lightly relieved, was not totally allayed. I could not understand why he persisted in worrying himself whereas everything seemed to be all right. I could have understood if I had really wished to - but it was already too late.

The end of the slow dance had caused a deadly silence to fall upon the assembly. Fortunately, Professor Dumbledore had broken it by clearing his throat, and, after winking at me (this time I was sure he had done it), he spoke:

"My dear students, my dear colleagues, Christmas will end within the hour. Following the example of Professor Snape and Miss Granger, let us celebrate joy, let us celebrate life! Let the music start again and let this dance floor radiate with love and unity, at least until midnight! Tango!"

The picture of a Professor Dumbledore with a ponytail and castanets appeared suddenly in my mind, and I could not suppress a chuckle. Severus, however, still looked sinister. Little by little, people started to speak again, still looking at us, though. Then the first notes of the tango sounded, and many couples let the music get the better of them. What they had just seen, and what it implied, would be a subject for later discussion.

"Tango, Professor Snape? Oh, come on, Severus, please smile! You see very well that everything is all right! Even Professor Dumbledore approved us!"

"I am sure he knew everything since the beginning. But the others - they don't know yet that we have been together of a year."

"All in good time, let them stomach that for the moment. We'll see later. Now, I want to dance!"

"You know how to dance the tango?"

"No, but I'm an excellent student, and you are an excellent professor."

"You are right. It is always a *pleasure* to teach you new things."

On that ambiguous sentence, we had embarked on the dance floor. I had let myself go in his arms, his footsteps, his eyes, which never left mine. Is there a more sensual dance than the tango? That relation of domination between us, which should have offended me in normal circumstances, made my heart melt that evening. He was glowing with firmness, power, and strength. His whole beauty and virility expressed themselves with that dance. I was like a weak woman filled with admiration for him. This cliché in all of this should have disgusted me, but while he bent me backwards once again, I only felt delightful thrills. The music transported us. We were higher than the dance floor. We were among the stars. We were one. One against all the others. No - one *amongst* all the others.

Notes had ceased at last, leaving us panting and out of breath. Some looks had become admiring in the face of our performance. I smiled at these people who had decided not to judge us. I didn't know them, they didn't know me, but we understood each other. It was all I had dreamed of. Oh, I would have liked Ron to react a little better too, but I couldn't ask too much.

We went and sat in order to recover. The Christmas ball ended a little more than an hour later, but we did not dance again; we had spoken. Some teachers came to see us, and I had the great pleasure of accepting best wishes from Minerva McGonagall, which I had taken as a benediction, coming from that saintly woman. Students had not been so courageous, but we received shy smiles. They were certainly aimed more at me than Severus, but, well...we were one, weren't we?

We left the Great Hall, hand in hand, and I was sure I heard some people whispering, "I have to admit, they look well together," or "It's a nice couple in fact," or "Strange - but if she's happy..." Oh, yes, I was. I couldn't have been more.

When got back to his quarters, I undertook the challenge of showing him the effect his suit produced on me.

But no sooner had I removed his jacket that he began to writher in pain, his right hand on his left arm.

"Severus! What is...?"

"Aaaaaa!"

"Severus! Is... Is it the Mark?"

"Yes... I... I have to go. Now. He is calling for us."

"You are not obliged!"

I knew very well that he was. Within one year I had attended this scene several times. And each time he had come back a few hours later in a pitiful state. I knew he could not escape this, but each time I desperately threw out that exclamation. That evening more than the others. He had no right to take him away from me; he had no right to hurt him on Christmas evening! Well, there were so many awful things he had no right to do. The ones concerning Severus were almost derisory. But I was so frightened each time.

"Of course I am! Don't... don't worry, I feel better already. A routine meeting. Maybe he just wants to wish us a belated Happy Christmas; it would be just like him."

"How can you joke now? Severus... he... he's going to take it out on you, isn't he?"

"Not necessarily, Hermione. And then, it is not as if I was not used to...."

I felt there was something he was not telling me. It was worse than he let show. I knew it, without understanding how or why. There are some things that cannot be explained. He took my face in his hands and kissed me very softly. I closed my eyes. I had the impression he breathed all his strength, all his love, in this kiss. All his life.

When I opened my eyes, he was wearing his wizard dress again. He pulled himself away from me, but kept his hand on my cheek. For the first time in my life, I heard his voice shaking.

"I love you, Hermione."

He vanished before I could say anything. For long minutes I caressed the spot on my cheek where I could still feel his fingers. For long minutes his words resounded in my head. Words he had said a thousand times before, but never with such intensity. The last words I ever heard him utter.

**oſo**

He was buried three days later.

Everybody expected me to deliver the funeral oration. I was not able. I simply was not able. Professor Dumbledore took care of it wonderfully. He delivered a very beautiful and very complimentary speech for a very acquiescent congregation. Bunch of hypocrites! Someone has to disappear to be excused all his faults. Or rather, the faults that had been attributed to him. Well, I know I can't really blame them. He had never tried to belie public opinion about him. Now I understand why. I understand the risks.

When he was found, the day after Christmas, I was the first to be informed by Professor Dumbledore. I had cried the whole night after his departure because I knew. The minute he had gone away, I had known. I had been sure. Some things cannot be explained.

Like cruelty, for example. The cruelty of a power-thirsty pseudo-man who could only conceive life in chaos and never in love.

Like the stupidity of a being who has established an extremely strict hierarchy among wizards and who cannot imagine a 'respectable wizard' could become infatuated with a 'filthy Muddblood'.

Like the inhumanity of a monster who punishes with death the ones who disappoint him.

That is what has been collected in Severus' last memories. He Apparated next to Voldemort and noted they were alone. He immediately got a dose of Cruciatus. While he was writhing with pain at ground level, his former master explained to him that one of his followers had reported back to him what had happened. He was disappointed. He was disgusted. He said this relationship could never properly exist. His criteria concerning propriety was not the same that Severus had put forward at the beginning of our story, of course. And he asked him to choose. One of us had to die. Of course he advised him to sacrifice me; he didn't really want to lose such a Potions expert as Severus was. And he was sure Severus would do this. It seemed that love was something he couldn't comprehend. He stopped the spell, in order to let Severus speak. And he spoke. As he knew I would hear him. As he knew I would be there, faced with the last moments collected in his Pensieve. He spoke very quickly, because he knew he would be interrupted before he could say everything he wanted.

"It is not your fault, Hermione. It will never be your fault! I love you! I don't die because of you! Keep on living, I beg you! Nothing is your fault! I love you, Hermione! I..."

*"Avada Kedavra!"*

And then nothing. Complete darkness. He was dead. Because of... no, very well... for me. But only because of my stupidity. I should have known. I should have understood. But he had never talked about it to me, and maybe I didn't want to admit it.

The problem was not our age.

It was not our status.

It was the war.

He didn't want me to worry. He only wanted me to be happy. I think he hoped too, that he was mistaken, that there was no danger for us after all. But he was always right. I could damn him for that. But he is already.

I kept on crying, for hours and hours, without being able to stop. Some things cannot be controlled.

Like the hate I will devote to Voldemort and his henchmen until their complete destruction.

Like the sorrow I will feel to my dying day. Whatever life has in store for me, whatever positive things it decides to grant me, I will suffer.

Like the love I will eternally feel for Severus. Whoever I meet, whoever makes me feel fine again, it is him I shall love in my heart of hearts.

No, we were not immortals. But our love was. It is. Someday we will be together again, I know it, I feel it. Maybe he is waiting for me at this very moment. Maybe he is looking at me, sitting by the fireside in my long black dress, gazing with eyes moist with tears at the snowflakes falling outside. Maybe he can hear Harry, Ron, Ginny, and the whole Weasley family, hurrying me to come and share the Yule log. Maybe he has watched me during the whole past year. Maybe he has taken care of me. Maybe he can feel my love.

Maybe he is there.



Or maybe I am already with him.

## THE END

---

*I hope you enjoyed because it is the only story of mine that I really like (er, except Severus' last sentences, which I hate because they are too insipid and they are not like him, but I found it was the way it has to end). Well, as it is a translation, I think it isn't as nice to read than the French version because I had to change some sentences, some formulations, because I didn't know how to translate them. I didn't want my beta readers to write my story instead of me, lol! Once again, thanks to Severusgirlx, ABlack and Victoria for their precious help.*