

Blasted Ball!

by debjunk

Severus is forced to attend a Ministry function. Will he be able to escape before he goes mad?

Oneshot

Chapter 1 of 1

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This story is for CeliaEquus who made an inspiring request.

Severus Snape sat at the table, eyeing the crowd. He frowned intensely.

Blasted Ball! Kingsley knows I hate these affairs, yet here I sit, basically forced to endure the horridness that is a Ministry dance.

His eyes scanned the table where he sat. Next to him was Harry Potter. Whomever had made the seating chart needed to be cursed. Potter's wife, Ginny sat to his right, followed by Potter's guest, the Ginger-haired monstrosity that was Ron Weasley. His wife and he had made names for themselves as the darlings of Quidditch. To his left, Hermione Granger had been seated, but right now she was smiling as she danced with a handsome Ministry official from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

He eyed the woman twirling on the dance floor. He'd long admired her intelligence, and sharp wit. Tonight he admired even more. She looked lovely in the long, sleek, black gown that wrapped itself around her like a glove, and her smile seemed to light up the room. He felt his insides stir as he realized just how beautiful she was. Good looks, intelligence, and... Merlin, help him... she was still single.

Still single... still single... The thought reverberated through his brain. That was the whole problem, wasn't it? She was still single, and he wanted her. Longed for her, really. He eyed the lucky man who held her. His dark hair was slicked back, and he eyed her appreciatively as his hands wandered around her back. Severus frowned as he saw her smile once more at him. She was enjoying herself. He should be glad for that, but it just made his insides knot up as his hands clench into fists.

He should be the one with his arms around her, feeling her close as he danced with her. Unfortunately, he was not the man with her, and would never be. Whenever the opportunity came up to spend quality time with her outside of the workplace, he clammed up and couldn't extend the invitation. He'd let her leave their office every night without having said those little words that might have been accepted by her. "Would you like to have dinner with me?"

No, his tongue got dry whenever he thought of asking her anything like that. He would try to speak, but no words would come. Then he'd beat himself over the head for losing yet another opportunity to get closer to her. The whole affair puzzled him to no end. He could speak with her about anything, but talking of romantic feelings set his cold, Slytherin heart into a state of cardiac arrest. He'd given up finally. It wasn't worth giving himself a heart attack every day. He thought the whole affair to be closed until the invitations to the Ministry Ball had come, and she'd been ecstatic.

"Oh, Severus, it'll be fun!"

He looked up from his own invitation and tried to glare at her, even though her excitement made him want to grin instead.

"It will be an exercise in frustration. All those officials bombasting about what a difference they're making. Utter tomfoolery."

She shrugged at him. "Nonetheless, I love these kind of things."

He'd tried to ask her to accompany him, but his voice had left him again. Clearing his throat, he'd finally told her that he would not be attending. Her frown had made him wonder about what she was thinking, but he'd not had time to ponder it as another inter-office memo had come sailing into their office and landed on his desk. It had been a personal letter from Kingsley *requesting* his presence. He'd crumpled up the message and left work early. The last thing he'd wanted to do was to spend a night following Hermione Granger around with only his eyes and seeing her being ogled by every unattached man in the Ministry.

Yet, here he was, doing just that. She twirled and smiled at the handsome man...Blakelee was his name...and he felt worse and worse with every turn she made. Finally, unable to witness anymore pleasure on the woman's face, he stood. Nodding to Potter and Weasley and their spouses, he turned and stalked away, hearing the muttering going on at the table he'd just left.

"He's just as pleasant as ever," Weasley commented.

"He'll never change," Potter agreed.

Ignoring the idiots, he stalked away, not paying attention to the lavish ice sculptures that adorned every table, nor the beautiful enchanted ceiling in the room that cast a picture of the night sky in all its glory overhead. He was in no mood to stargaze, especially when the only person he'd like to do that with was happily enjoying another man's company.

As the current song ended, Severus quickly left the party area, moving down the hallway and to a deserted room. This would do nicely. He entered and shut the door most of the way. He knew that to close it entirely would invoke curiosity, as all the rooms on this floor always remained open for guests. Knowing that he wouldn't be able to leave early, he'd come prepared. Kingsley, he knew, would be keeping a close eye on him to make sure he stayed until the end of the ball. A nondescript man, however, would be ignored by the Minister of Magic.

Withdrawing his wand from his sleeve he waved it around his head and body, effectively placing a glamour over his normal dark features. Walking over to a mirror, he looked into it. His hair had gone from jet black to a light brown. It was a little longer than he usually wore it, so he pulled a tie out of his pocket and secured it behind his neck. His nose was not its usual monstrous size, but was now refined... even aristocratic. *Perhaps I should leave it?* He shook his head. There was no use in that, really. Straight nose or not, he was still unappealing.

His eyes hadn't been altered at all. He wouldn't be in the room long enough for anyone to notice the similarity in eye color of the image before him with that of Severus Snape. He looked himself over and quickly flicked his wand, making his suit change color from black to navy blue. Satisfied that no one would take him for who he truly was, he turned and left the room, heading back to the ballroom and his long sought-after escape.

He'd made it almost all the way across the ballroom when the unthinkable happened. *She* had asked him to dance. Hermione had spied him from across the room and had hurried to his side, extending a hand to still his quick pace.

"Sir, would you like to dance?"

He frowned instantly, but replaced the grimace seamlessly with a taught smile. This was not in his plan at all. His whole reason for glamouring himself and exiting was to get away from Hermione, not to dance with her. He gave her a curt nod and extended his hand for her. She arched an eyebrow at him as she gazed closely into his face and placed her hand in his. Leading her to the dance floor, they were soon twirling in the same fashion he'd watched her do with Blakeslee. She smiled up at him as she moved.

"My name is Hermione," she offered.

He cleared his throat and pitched his voice nearly an octave higher than usual. "Yes, I believe everyone here tonight knows who you are," he countered.

She nodded. "You, however, I don't know."

His mind raced as he thought of a name. "Steven... Steven Astor," he replied finally. She didn't seem to notice his hesitation. As they continued to move about the dance floor, he marveled in the feel of her so very close to him. It was truly wondrous.

"What department do you work in, Steven?"

"Oh... I'm in... Transportation. Low level... just started a month ago."

She nodded at him slowly. "Do you like your position?"

He shrugged. "It's a job."

She laughed at that.

"Where do you work?" he asked her.

"I serve on the Wizengamot."

He arched an eyebrow, pretending to be impressed. "Really?"

She nodded.

"I heard that members of the Wizengamot only share an office with one other member of the court."

"Yes, that's true."

"I share an office with twenty people," he made up.

"I'm sure you always have someone to talk with," Hermione said with a laugh.

"Who do you share an office with?"

"Severus Snape."

Severus frowned, playing his part in the most Slytherin of ways. "How did that monstrosity get on the Wizengamot, might I ask?"

She stiffened a bit before answering. "Severus Snape is a war hero and honorable man. He got on the Wizengamot by his merits, just like everyone else."

"If you say so," Severus said with a roll of his eyes. "What's he like really? I hear he has a terrible temper."

Hermione got a faraway look in her eyes. "He's sometimes a bit short, I'll admit that. Most of the time, however, he's quite pleasant."

Severus couldn't help the arch in his eyebrow at her statement. "Pleasant?"

She nodded. "I just wish he knew how I felt about him."

Severus' mouth went completely dry. He tried to speak, but no words would leave his mouth. He swallowed a few times. He wanted to know... needed to know how she felt. Finally, his voice came to him.

"How, exactly do you feel about him?"

She looked him directly in the eye. "I care about him, but he doesn't see it. I think he thinks he's not good for me, but I don't agree with him. I want him to know how I feel, but I don't want to frighten him away. His friendship is most important to me, and I don't want him to feel pressured because I care for him and he has no interest in me whatsoever."

Severus almost gaped at her statement. He eyed her in amazement. She was smiling at him still. Without even thinking, his heart took over, and he bent low and placed a kiss on this woman he had cherished for so long. She responded to him, and his heart leapt. Kissing her was even better than he'd ever imagined. Just feeling her lips beneath his, kissing him lovingly...

Severus pulled back sharply and eyed her contemptuously. "You evidently lie, because you kissed me as if you wanted me. Perhaps this Snape fellow is lucky not to know of your attentions."

He spun around and began to stalk away.

"Severus!" she called out over the music.

He stopped dead. Anger filled him. She'd known it was him all along, and she'd *toyed* with him! Despite the anger that was filling him, there was a spark of hope deep within him that he couldn't push away no matter how he tried. Feeling her hand on his arm, he turned slightly to give her a sidelong glance.

"I know it's you," she whispered.

Turning quickly, he grabbed her arm and hurriedly led her out of the dance hall and out to the balcony. The music faded into light background music as they made their way farther away from the hall itself. Looking about the balcony, Severus was relieved to see it empty. He led her to the far edge, not noticing the beautiful stars that adorned the sky out here were even lovelier than those in the enchanted ceiling.

"How long did you know?" he barked.

She looked as if he'd startled her with his gruffness. She gave him a determined look. "I saw you change your appearance in the back room. I followed you when I saw you leaving the dance area because I thought you were going to try and sneak out the back way."

"You thought it would be funny, then, to play this little game?" he said in a low, menacing voice.

She looked away and out over the balcony. "I..."

"What, no defense for the know-it-all? You decided to play with fire, Hermione, now the consequences come back to burn you. I am not one to be trifled with, and I do not appreciate you playing with me, making up stories of caring for me when I know you care not one whit whether I walk this earth or not."

She pulled her arm from his hand then and glared at him.

"I may have pretended not to know you, Severus Snape, but everything..." She stepped closer to him and glared at him even harder. "Everything I said was the truth. I knew it was you, and I knew you would never say anything to me about deepening our relationship. I wanted you to know that I care about you, and I would want that. Maybe I was wrong, though. Maybe you don't care for me at all."

She wheeled around and stalked off. Severus stared after her, dumbfounded. He watched her, unable to move himself from the position he was frozen in. She was nearly back in the dance hall before he got a hold of himself. He literally sprinted after her, catching up with her quickly.

"Hermione," he called as he grabbed her shoulder. "Stop, please..."

She did stop, but would not turn toward him.

"Turn around, I beg you."

She turned and looked at him, her face hard. He could see she was trying to hide the deep hurt he'd just inflicted upon her. Gathering her into his arms, he hugged her to him like a lifeline. This was what he'd wanted to do for so long now... he couldn't even remember when his feelings for her had turned romantic.

"I'm sorry..." he whispered in her ear. "I thought..."

Her arms came around him as well, and she hugged him. Him...Severus Snape...she hugged *him*. If the world decided to end at this moment, he would definitely die a happy man.

"I know what you thought, Severus Snape. You never give yourself any credit, and you can't trust anyone around you."

She pulled back and looked into his eyes. "Do you care about me, or not?" she asked bluntly.

He stared at her for a long time, debating within himself. If he told her how he felt, he'd be opening himself up to anything. Vulnerability was not something he was used to in his life. However, if he lied about his feelings, not only would he give up the possibility of ever being with this witch, he probably would lose her trust as well. Something deep within him told him she knew exactly how he felt about her. His internal debate went on as he looked into the beautiful brown eyes of the woman he wanted so much to share a life with.

"Hermione, I am in love with you," he answered finally. "I had just thought you were not interested in me, so I never tried to deepen our relationship."

She lifted her hand and caressed his cheek. "Oh, you couldn't be more wrong. I..." Her voice fell to a hushed whisper. "I love you, too."

Elation filled him, and he quickly lifted his wand to drop his glamours. He closed the gap with her and kissed her huskily. This was no chaste kiss, but one filled with all the pent up emotions he'd been holding within himself for so very long. She let out a small groan, which set him on fire from within. He felt her fingers tangle in his hair, and he groaned himself at the thought that her kisses were for him and only him.

The couple were so engrossed in their activities, they didn't notice two men walking out onto the balcony: one with ginger hair and the other with jet-black hair. The two men stopped and stared at the couple in front of them for a minute before looking at each other in wonder.

"I didn't see that coming," Harry said to Ron.

"Yeah... I mean, they share an office and all..." Ron muttered.

"They must spend a lot of time together," Harry mused as he looked back at the couple making a spectacle of themselves, locked in each other's embrace.

"Maybe he *can* change," Ron mused.

Harry's voice became slightly louder. "He'd better, because if he hurts her, I'll kill him with my own wand and dance on his grave."

Severus, realizing they were no longer alone, pulled away from Hermione for the smallest second.

"I have no intention of ever hurting her, or letting her go, Potter. Now can't you see we would like some privacy?"

He quickly forgot they were there and returned to Hermione, who had not bothered to take her gaze off Severus' face. He smiled down at her before continuing to ravish her lips like they were sweet honey from the gods.

Harry looked at Ron, who shrugged. They turned and left the couple to themselves, placing wards on the entryway before returning to the dance, not wanting anyone else to be disgusted by the display of their friend and her newfound lover.

The couple was near enough to feel the wards go up. Severus pulled away from Hermione again.

"Potter actually thought for himself," he murmured.

Hermione slapped him lightly on the chest. "I've always said you don't give him enough credit."

Hugging her to him, he led her back to the edge of the balcony, where the couple looked at the stars.

"I couldn't have hoped for this, Hermione. Thank you for being blunt with me. You were right, I would have never said anything on my own."

Hermione rested her head on his shoulder. "There were so many times I just wanted to walk over to you and kiss you outright."

He laughed a little and squeezed her to him. "You should have. Although being so very old, I might have had a heart attack right there."

She looked up at him and placed her hand on his chest. "You're not old, Severus."

"Not when I'm with you, my dear."

This time, their kiss was only witnessed by the stars above, and that was just how Severus wanted it to be. He silently acknowledged his good fortune as he reveled in her touch. Thank Merlin Kingsley had made him come to this Blasted Ball.

A/N: Prompt by CeliaEquus from a review of my story 'The Ministry Ball on FFN: You know what you should do? You should write an alternate version of this story where Severus is the one with a glamour. Then, either he tells Hermione

how he feels--like in this story--or she tells him how she feels.