

Dance with Me

by linlawless

Hermione ruins Severus's plan to "enjoy" Minerva's birthday party. But perhaps he won't mind so much... Inspired by a prompt from the lovely and talented Subversa.

A Ficlet

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author Note: Many thanks, as always, to my brilliant alpha/beta team, karelia and TeaOli, and my Britpicker, Proulxes. As usual, I tinkered a bit after I got it back, so any mistakes remain my own.

Original Prompt: SSHG - Their eyes meet across a crowded room ... now, take it anywhere you want to go!

Severus sipped the hundred-year-old, single malt scotch he had ordered one of the house-elves to pilfer from Minerva's private stock and glowered at anyone who even looked his way. He was still Headmaster, damn it, and just because Minerva had managed to bully persuade him into attending her ninetieth birthday party didn't mean he had to be accommodating or, Merlin forbid, *pleasant*. And it certainly entitled him to the best alcohol to be had in the castle.

He was pondering the all-important question of how long he had to stay at this overly loud, horribly boisterous gathering when he chanced to catch the eye of someone who didn't startle and scurry away at the sight of his most fearsome glare.

Hermione was amused when Headmaster Snape scowled at her from his almost-hidden position over next to the large potted tree in the far corner of the Great Hall. Really, couldn't the man relax and enjoy himself just this once? Minerva was his *friend*, for goodness's sake! *Someone should force that man to enjoy himself!*

He was still trying to frighten her away or perhaps give her nightmares? With his facial expression, she noted, growing even more amused as she realised she had been staring for an unaccountably long time. Didn't he understand that, having dealt with a Basilisk and a megalomaniacal madman or say nothing of assorted other lethal creatures and criminals before the age of eighteen, she had long since grown immune to the scowls and glares, however fierce, of people who were essentially *good* men?

Taking a sip of her martini, Hermione broke eye contact and started towards him, weaving and dodging the people in various stages of drunken delight as she made her way around the edge of the dance floor.

Dammit! She's coming this way! He supposed he oughtn't be surprised. She had never seemed truly afraid of him, not even in her youth when everyone else had believed his Death Eater role was real. He watched her progress around the perimeter of the ballroom, inadvertently wincing on her behalf when a particularly inebriated young man made the mistake of grabbing her bum as he stumbled against her after one of his chums slapped him on the shoulder with just a bit too much force. The lad immediately

found himself on the wrong end of a Stinging Hex if the way he shook his hand was any indication, Severus noted with mildly reluctant approval. One couldn't help admiring a woman who kept frisky fools in line so efficiently. *She must do very well for herself at the Ministry*, he supposed. That place was, after all, teeming with fools risky or otherwise.

She smiled at him when she arrived, and he reflexively frowned at an unusual little jolt of energy that seemed to be provoked by it. Rather than saying hello, she asked, "Care to dance, Headmaster Snape?"

"Not particularly," he replied.

"Are you sure?" she asked, her smile widening. "I suspect Minerva will harass you mercilessly when she realises you spent her entire birthday party moping about in the corner."

"Even more so when she discovers the dent I've made in her supply of good scotch," he muttered, then decided he was slipping in his advancing years: she had heard a comment he hadn't intended to make out loud.

She laughed. "Yes. Even more so then."

"She's busy." Snape inclined his head in the direction he had last seen his erstwhile friend dancing with Kingsley Shacklebolt. "She won't notice much about my enjoyment, nor the lack thereof. In fact, I was just thinking I could safely leave her and her guests to their fun."

Granger shook her head almost mournfully, and Severus narrowed his eyes. What was the pain in his arse witch up to? She said, "Well, as her friend and protegee, I cannot in good conscience leave her ignorant of such a sad state of affairs, can I?" She paused, and her expression bordered on predatory when she added, "Of course, if you were to dance with me, any claim that anyone might make that you were trying to spoil her party would seem spurious, wouldn't it?"

"You're not seriously attempting to blackmail me into dancing with you, are you?" Severus was sure he must be mistaken. "Gryffindors don't blackmail people. They rush headlong into trouble of all kinds, but surely blackmail is far too subtle for a Gryffindor...?"

Granger laughed again. "Dance with me, and I'll tell you all about my first foray into blackmail. It involved an unregistered Animagus and *daily Prophet* article." She held out her hand.

Curiosity won out. Draining the remainder of his drink in one swallow, he Vanished the glass back to the kitchens and took her outstretched hand. He enjoyed the tingle that raced over his skin at the contact. How long had it been since he had felt that first glimmer of attraction nudging him to do something a little bit foolish romantic? "Two things you ought to know before we do this: one, I'm very rusty with dancing, as it's been decades since I last attempted it; and two, this story had better be worth it, Miss Granger."

"I think you'll find it very amusing, if only because it was so incredibly Gryffindor in its brash foolishness. And please, call me Hermione."

For the first time that evening, Severus couldn't help smiling. As they began to waltz, he said, "Then I suppose you must call me Severus."