

I'll Sweep You off Your Hooves

Canterlot parties were always quiet and reserved. The most that ever happened during them was slow dancing, and that's just how the Canterlot Elite liked it. Suffice to say, when Frederic Horseshoepin entered the party hall, it was more akin to slipping into a nice warm bath, unlike diving into the glacial whirlpool of the much livelier parties in smaller towns. Frederic had been to dozens of these parties, usually as a pianist in an ensemble. Tonight, however, he was simply another guest. He hadn't even felt the need to dress up; he thoroughly washed his white mane and brown coat, and he made sure that the eighth notes of his cutie mark weren't blemished, and that was that.

The party itself was a typical quiet Canterlot Party; upper class ponies mingled in groups, their voices almost becoming one with the music. All the ponies were dressed in fancy clothes, from the simple collar and bow tie around Frederic's own neck to elaborate suits and dresses in every bright color imaginable. The band played a soft, soothing melody that settled around the crowd of ponies like a warm blanket, permitting the partygoers to converse at their leisure.

Frederic scanned the room until he spotted who he'd been looking for: a purple earth stallion with blue hair and a harp for his cutie mark. Frederic smiled and trotted over to his friend and immediately spoke up to catch his attention. "Harpo, it's good to see you here."

Harpo smiled as he and Frederic embraced; Frederic spoke as they separated, "I assume you came with Beauty Brass. Where is she?"

Harpo nodded his head off to the right, indicating where his friend should look. Frederic saw a blue pony with a brown mane carefully maneuvering around the crowds of ponies, doing her best to avoid creating any disruptions.

However, once Beauty Brass had a clear path, she shot over to Frederic and Harpo in an instant, punctuating her arrival with a loud greeting: "HI FRED! NICE TO SEE YOU HERE!"

While Harpo merely stepped back, Frederic momentarily reared on his hind legs, covering his ears with his forehooves: "Beauty Brass, please! Can you at least try to control your volume at a social gathering like this?" he asked before dropping back down to all fours. A few ponies had turned to glare at Beauty Brass when she shouted, but by now, they had all returned to previous conversations.

"SORR- I mean, sorry, I'm worKING on it." Beauty Brass bit her tongue in an attempt to keep her voice down.

“You have made some progress, I’ll admit,” Frederic replied. Harpo nodded in agreement.

“THANK you.” Beauty Brass took a deep breath before speaking slowly and being careful to keep her voice at a respectable level. “Can we dance, Harpo?”

Harpo smiled and nodded, offering his leg to Beauty Brass who accepted enthusiastically. The couple moved to the area where some ponies were trying to dance to the mood music.

“I think I shall enjoy a drink for now,” Frederic called after his friends before heading for the bar.

Even over by the bar the mood was quite subdued as old friends and acquaintances shared conversations and memories. Frederic searched the seats and spotted a grey mare seated alone, wearing a dress with descending layers of lavender, purple, and blue in a design he had not seen before.

Frederic was not sure if he knew the mare or not; he had not gotten a good look at her, and her cutie mark was covered by her dress. However, he gathered his wits and took a deep breath. He briefly wondered, *Should I... or shouldn't I?* Making up his mind, he went over and sat next to her. He offered her a warm greeting: “Good evening, miss. May I ask your na... Octavia?!” Frederic’s expression turned to one of surprise when he realized the mare was his ensemble-mate, Octavia Philharmonica.

Octavia managed a smile and chuckled as the stallion took his seat. “I knew you would be here, Frederic. Why are you so surprised?”

“It’s just, well...” Frederic chose his words carefully so he wouldn’t accidentally upset her. “I’ve never seen you in a dress before. Usually you just wear a bow-tie like myself and our other friends.”

Octavia nodded in agreement. “It’s from a boutique in Ponyville. I asked the proprietor for something simple yet unique and this is what she came up with.”

“I, for one, think the look suits you, Octavia,” Frederic complimented before turning to the bartender. “Hello, two glasses of red wine for us over here,” he called.

Octavia sighed and slumped forwards, the pearls around her neck clacking lightly as they came into contact with the bar counter. The bartender poured the wine out into two glasses

allowing Frederic to take a careful sip. Noticing Octavia's rather downtrodden expression, Frederic set his glass down and turned to her.

"Is something wrong?" he inquired, pushing the glass of wine towards the grey pony.

"It's just that..." Octavia sighed and sat up. "Ever since Beauty Brass got up the nerve to ask Harpo to date her..." The cellist glanced over at where their two friends were dancing, or at least trotting together to the beat of the music.

"I've been feeling a little lonely."

"Longing for love?" Frederic asked, curious.

"Yes. I like them both, but Brass and Harpo are so *different*: he almost never speaks and she can almost never stop shouting; he's reserved and she's anything but. Yet even so, they found love in each other." Octavia's nearly bare foreleg finally lifted her glass, allowing her to taste the wine. "Thank you for listening, Fred. I really needed somepony to talk to."

"It's never any trouble, Octavia," Frederic placed a hoof on her shoulder, "You can always come to me with anything, good news or bad." Octavia just smiled in response and returned to her wine.

At first, the two friends just sat and drank in silence. Gradually, Frederic and Octavia struck up a conversation. They spoke of their ensemble, Harpo and Beauty Brass' relationship, future performances, and where they believed their careers might be going.

Frederic was about to order another drink when the music stopped, and a moment later, the soft mood music was replaced with a waltz. The stallion smiled and began to hum along with the three beats of the music; he glanced at the center of the floor where the couples who had been awkwardly swaying to the beat of the music slowly transitioned into a waltz themselves. Frederic turned back to Octavia, whose expression hadn't brightened in the slightest; it always made him feel so sad to see that beautiful mare down in the dumps, so he resolved to do what it took to cheer her up.

Frederic slid off his stool and cleared his throat to catch Octavia's attention: "Octavia," he waited until the mare turned to face him before asking: "Would you like to dance?"

"Oh, well Frederic," Octavia's eyes shot left and right, searching for eavesdroppers, "I... don't know how to dance," the last line was barely audible, yet Frederic caught every word.

“You can’t dance?” he asked, blinking twice then just staring at Octavia.

“I never bothered to learn,” Octavia admitted as she carefully slid off her own stool. “I was always trying to be a better cellist. Every time my mother tried to offer me dance lessons I turned them down. I never thought I’d need to know.”

“Well then, allow me to teach you.” Frederic took Octavia’s hoof in her own and led her carefully to the dance floor.

Octavia’s legs were shaking slightly as she and Fred stopped and he turned to her. “Now stand up on your hind legs and just lean on me like you do with your cello.” Frederic reared up carefully as Octavia did the same, placing her hooves on Frederic’s shoulders as she came up level with him. “Good.” Frederic nodded. He placed a hoof on her midsection and took one of hers in his free hoof. “Now, put your hoof on my shoulder.” Octavia did as instructed. Frederic nodded before he gave her a smile of approval. “Now, I know you can follow directions very well. Just carefully follow me.” Frederic began to sway softly to the beat of the waltz, waiting for Octavia to follow his movement.

It took some time before Octavia was able to start moving in rhythm with her dance partner, but she was a quick study, and after a few minutes she was able to follow Frederic’s lead quite well.

“You’re doing very well for your first time,” Frederic complimented the mare as they waltzed with music.

“Oh, thank you.” Octavia found herself blushing at the compliment.

Frederic smiled. “I just noticed you have your ears pierced,” he commented, having somehow not noticed the gold studs through Octavia’s ears. “I think it suits you.”

“Thank you, Frederic. It was a pain to keep them clean for so long, so I’m just happy somepony appreciates them.” Octavia relaxed at the wrong moment and felt her hoof slip from under her. Octavia panicked, trying to right herself before she sent them both toppling to the dance floor. Frederic moved to catch her and they skidded slightly out of line. However, Frederic carefully spun Octavia back into the dance without missing a step, and they carefully slid back into the movements of the waltz.

“LOOKING GOOD!” The voice came from Beauty Brass some distance away; she was

grinning and waving at the dancing pair. Beauty Brass' excited waving had almost caused her and Harpo to topple over not unlike Octavia's misstep, but the harp player's good sense of balance kept them upright.

As usual, Brass' shout had drawn the attention of other guests, but this time she was far enough away that neither Frederic nor Octavia minded her shouting this once. Frederic briefly smiled in their direction before turning his attention back to his inexperienced yet fast-learning dance partner.

Eventually, the piece ended, thus allowing Octavia to return to all four hooves, a bit tired but happy none-the-less. "Thank you for the dance, Fred," she said.

"Think nothing of it, my dear Octavia." Frederic gave her a small bow.

Frederic looked back up at Octavia and scrunched up his mouth for a moment. "Octavia, was that too much for you?"

Octavia blinked, then ran her hoof across her brow, bringing a small amount of sweat with it: "Oh, well, it was my first dance. Please excuse me, I just need to get some fresh air." Octavia turned and trotted towards the open balcony, stopping briefly to pull at her dress' collar. Frederic just stood and watched, sighing contentedly.

"She's so kind and beautiful, and carries herself with such grace, regardless of whether she's playing or dancing," Frederic was speaking under his breath. "She's absolutely stunning."

"You should go after her, then." Frederic jumped at the whisper and spun around to come face-to-face with a smiling stallion.

"Harpo?" Frederic's eyes widened as Harpo continued.

"I've heard you speak admirably of her so many times, Frederic. I know that you love her as much as I love Beauty Brass. Yet while I'm the silent one, you're the one who's too afraid to voice your feelings because you're afraid that she'll reject you. I've seen the way she looks at you, even just now while you were dancing. She may not know it yet, but Octavia loves you, Fred, and all you need to do is tell her how you feel. Now go," Harpo gave his friend a gentle nudge towards the door. "Go and sweep Octavia Philharmonica off her hooves before somepony else does."

"Thank you, Harpo. I will." Frederic gave a grateful nod to his friend before practically

galloping towards the balcony door.

In the wake of Frederic's departure, Beauty Brass returned to her date's side. "What was that about?" she asked, doing a remarkably good job of keeping her voice at a reasonable level.

To her surprise, Harpo answered with words rather than a gesture. "I think Frederic's going to tell Octavia how he feels."

"REALLY? THAT'S GREAT!" The excitement caused Beauty Brass to lose control over her volume as she danced in place, grinning in anticipation and nearly dashing off right then and there. Harpo put an end to any such thoughts when he gave Beauty Brass a sudden deep kiss. Beauty Brass was rooted to the spot and her legs practically turned to rubber. Harpo stepped back and smiled, gesturing to the hors d'oeuvres table with his hoof. Beauty Brass nodded with a goofy grin adorning her face, and the mutually silent couple moved off to find something to eat.

Octavia was grateful for the cool night breeze as she sat on the balcony bench, helping her to dry off the sweat from the impromptu dance lesson that Frederic had given her. Octavia felt a pounding in her chest even though she had now come to a rest. The cellist gazed out at the light of Canterlot while thoughts raced through her mind until it was a confusing mess she couldn't begin to sort out.

Frederic slowed to a trot as he approached the balcony doors, carefully plucking a de-thorned rose from a vase before stepping outside. Octavia continued to stare out across Canterlot as Frederic stepped onto the balcony and carefully slipped the rose behind her right ear. Octavia blinked and turned to face Frederic, at a loss for words as she reached up to feel the rose with her hoof.

"I thought you'd look good with a rose behind your ear," Frederic complemented with a bright smile. "Mind if I join you, Octavia?"

"Not at all, Frederic." Octavia edged sideways, making room for the stallion as he hopped up to sit beside her.

"Beautiful," Frederic stated reverently.

"Yes, it is," Octavia replied, not noticing that Frederic gaze wasn't directed at the city.

A moment passed before Octavia could manage to speak up again. "Thank you for the dance lesson, Frederic."

“It was no trouble, Octavia; you’re a fast learner. You always have been.” Frederic bowed his head slightly. A moment passed in silence while Frederic gathered his courage as he recalled what Harpo had told him: “*Go and sweep Octavia Philharmonica off her hooves...*”

Frederic took a deep breath and swallowed his insecurities before he spoke: “Octavia, there’s something I need to tell you.”

“Oh?” Octavia turned to face Frederic, noticing that he was chewing his lower lip and scratching the back of his head.

Frederic was forced to take another deep breath before he continued: “Octavia, we’ve been friends for a long time, and we’ve played together ever since high school. Every time you play, I see you put your whole heart and soul into your music with a grace I’ve yet to see in any other mare. You’re one of the kindest ponies I know: you comforted Harpo and me when our high school band director rejected our compositions. You even stood up to him when he said our playing was ‘like the sound of a cat whose toes were being teased with pliers’.”

“You did the same for me when he said something similar about my cello playing.” Octavia blushed and averted her eyes.

Frederic placed a hoof on Octavia’s cheek, carefully turning her face until their eyes met. “I’ve been afraid to bring this up for a while now, but Harpo told me that I should stop delaying or I might lose you. I love you, Octavia Philharmonica. I have for quite some time now.” He had finally said it!

Octavia blinked, and then just stared open-mouthed at Frederic, as she processed what he had just told her.

Frederic began chewing his lower lip again, waiting for Octavia’s response with baited breath, getting more nervous with each second that passed in silence. Before the mare could answer, the music changed to a flowing classical dance number. Frederic smiled, he knew that somehow Harpo was responsible, and slipped off the bench before he offered his hoof to the mare he had just confessed his love to: “Octavia, may I have this dance?”

How could she refuse? Octavia nodded and smiled as she took Frederic’s hoof and let him lead her back into the party.

The music was a slow classical ballad that filled the room with emotion as Frederic and

Octavia stood on their hind legs and once again began to dance. Their dance was different this time; instead of a simple three-beat waltz, the song was a moving melody that Frederic led his partner through with an expert grace that Octavia could barely keep up with, yet somehow he kept her standing.

Octavia was mesmerized. She knew that Frederic was a skilled piano player and he had shown her how to dance earlier but *this*-- she never knew he had this kind of grace when dancing nor that he could so easily compensate for her lack of dancing experience.

There were other couples dancing, of course, and those on the sidelines were all watching those they knew. Two pairs of eyes were fixated on Frederic and Octavia: those of Harpo and Beauty Brass; neither had to say a word but they knew that this was Frederic's moment of truth. The voices of the other ponies faded to white noise around Octavia and Frederic as they danced. For the moment only the music of the band was having any effect on them.

Frederic took a chance as he heard the song progress into its final movement and picked up the pace, spinning his partner around gently, yet with restrained exhilaration. At first, Octavia was taken by surprise, but she closed her eyes as the air whipped past her face and her dress flared out, allowing Frederic complete control. Frederic spun his partner until the last note sounded and he fell back to his hooves, with three on the ground and the fourth carefully propping her up. Octavia leaned back against Frederic's hoof as she opened her violet eyes and they met the stallion's green ones. Time seemed to stand still for the both of them. Finally, Frederic let her down and all four of her hooves touched the floor.

As the mood music returned, Frederic and Octavia made their way to the edge of the party where there were fewer ponies. Frederic repeated what he had said on the balcony, this time without a hint of hesitation: "I love you, Octavia Philharmonica."

"I love you too, Frederic Horseshoepin." Those six words sent a wave of exhilaration through the stallion. It was all Frederic could do to keep himself from bursting with happiness; he was barely able to maintain his composure with the restraint he had built up through the years. The only reaction he could allow himself was to smile. The moment had come for him and he moved closer to Octavia before finally they shared their first kiss.

Harpo and Beauty Brass had wandered over in time to see the new couple's first kiss. Brass leaned against her coltfriend and couldn't resist cooing, "AWWW!" Her loud voice shocked the two out of their kiss. Harpo just rolled his eyes and smiled while Beauty Brass grinned sheepishly. "SORRY!"

“It’s alright, Beauty Brass,” Octavia reassured her, “It was just one kiss... but I think that there will be many more to come.”

“Thank you, all of you.” Frederic gave Octavia an affectionate nuzzle. It didn’t matter how the rest of the night went now. With a little help, Frederic had seized his opportunity, and he faced it with no regrets. Now, nothing could possibly make him happier.