

Gift of the Heart

by Ravenswing

What would you give up for love?

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"There... It's done."

"When will we know it works?"

"I don't honestly know... There was no way to test it."

"You mean to tell me that you invented this and did not test it? Are you insane?!"

"Don't you dare get huffy with me! The logic is sound, and how was I to test it? You are the only subject willing!"

"You could have found a picture of a cat or a threstral or a hippogriff, for Merlin's sake! But to try it out on me first? I would almost think you planned this! That I would be gone forever! Oh, wouldn't that be rich! Everyone would think I finally received my comeuppance. Why, of all the hair-brained..."

She tuned out his words as she worked her bottom lip and twirled her hair tightly. She was waiting for the signal.

She had accepted the job at Hogwarts, and it was like coming home. The students were more of a handful than she had anticipated though. It was during one of her nightly circuits of the castle she took to calm herself that he finally spoke to her.

"So, you finally figured out why I was such a bastard, no? Dunderheads, all of them!" he had drawled, an amused smirk on his face.

"Not all of them! A large outstanding portion, yes," she had muttered.

And he had startled her by outright laughing. She had never seen him truly laugh. The lines were erased from his face, and his eyes shone. And she had been entranced.

The project had started with an offhand comment – the subject of the paints used to create wizard portraits and how they managed to give life to the subject on canvas. It became a favorite discussion between them, and she found something to whole-heartedly research, for she had lost her heart without even realizing it to the acerbic wizard.

An old, wizened master painter in the bowels of Florence had been the one to tell her the secret. "Anyone can paint, but a master is the one who makes them come alive. Every time we paint, we give up a small part of us. You must be willing to give that up." It was the heart of the painter that created life in the paintings. The heart was the key. In order for him to live, she needed to be willing to give up hers. Armed with that knowledge, she created a brush that drew its energy from her heart.

The other part of the equation was the desire for life. Many portraits said they were happy as they were. The world had changed too much, and life was easier in the

portrait. He was the only one who wished to leave, the only one who had something to live for, the only one who wanted to feel the harshness of life outside a gilt frame. And to be honest, he was the only one she would willingly give everything up for.

Finally, here was the signal. The brush began to vibrate, and her hand began to glow. She stepped forward quickly, reaching out in front of her. The coolness of the canvas surprised her as she pushed her hand through into the painting.

"Severus, stop your whining, and take my hand."

His shocked look was nearly priceless, but his small delay was literally killing her.

He desperately reached for her as she fell back, pulling him to her. Together, they collapsed on the stone floor. She could feel her life force ebb and wane. She weakly gazed up to the obsidian eyes and whispered, "I love you with all my heart."

"I know, you silly chit, and I love you too." He unceremoniously ripped her blouse open and exposed her chest. Taking the brush and dipping it into the paint she had devised, he painted a large heart shape over her left breast. The brush began to vibrate, and his hand began to glow. He placed his hand over her heart, and she felt her strength returning.

"I don't understand, Severus. I was willing to give up everything so you could have life. That was to be my gift to you."

"And you did, my dear. And I am just as willing to return that gift. Together we will keep each other alive, for you gave me your heart, and I have just given you mine."

A tear escaped her, and she laughed softly. "Such the romantic, Severus."

"Only for you, Hermione, only for you."

Story written for Bring Out Your Dead! challenge at Romancing the Wizard.

Rules required 750 words exactly, an original item and my prompt was Receiving A Gift.