

The Love Letter

by Helena Rickman

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N – Major character deaths. Tissue alert. I am most grateful to Dreamy_Dragon, who so generously beta'd this. You are wonderful! BTW – not mine, no money.

The gentle early morning sunshine breaking through the curtains along with the chatting of fieldfares brought Severus to a slow wake. The birds frequented his long-unused potions garden, seeking the early season berries dropping from the overgrown Boom Berry bush. As he swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood, Severus felt every joint creak in his one hundred twenty-nine-year-old body.

Severus slowly made his way to the kitchen, anticipation weighing heavily on his heart. It had been six years, four months, three days, eleven hours and forty-four minutes since his Hermione had drawn her last breath.

~~~sshg~~~

As he opened the cupboard, his eyes spotted the letter awaiting him propped next to their teapot. His Hermione – what a brilliant and talented witch.

This would be the fifth message from her, written during her last months and charmed to appear each Valentine's Day. Her fragrance permeated the parchment: lavender, honey and vanilla. A single tear crept down his face to dampen his smile.

He could surmise from the script that this might be the last year he would see her words. Her penmanship was jagged and broken, a sign of the pain she had endured during her final days.

~~~sshg~~~

After the second wizarding war, Severus Snape was astounded he was still alive. With his burdens lifted and his debts discharged for the first time in his thirty-eight years, he was a free man. The obsession he had carried for Lily Evans seemed to disappear suddenly; he knew he had exacted revenge upon her executioner. He no longer felt compelled by any obsessions.

Hermione moved through his life like a placid tide. He would see her on occasion at potion seminars – always in the periphery, then disappearing for months, only to be spotted again leaving an apothecary moments before his arrival.

~~~sshg~~~

Severus was no coward. He recognized the witch would be a perfect complement to his life. After a casual courtship, he entered into a hand-fasting bond with his capable match. Severus' intention was to find an agreeable companion for life; he had never intended to fall madly in love with a woman again.

Little did he anticipate how fond he would grow of those endearing habits he greatly yearned for now. Her melodic hum as she bathed, the freshly baked biscuits on rainy

afternoons, preparing ingredients for the day's potion orders, her every gentle action bespoke her love for him.

~~~sshg~~~

Life with Hermione Snape may have been solitary, but it was more than satisfactory. Bellatrix Lestrange's torture ensured Hermione would never bring a child into the world. Though Hermione's biggest regret had always been she could not bear him offspring, Severus did not find his life lacking.

Hermione could always hold her best with him in discourse and learned how to challenge him soundly in a game of wizard chess. She loved travelling the world, seeking exotic ingredients and researching ancient libraries. And oh, what a witch he would bring to his bed. Her Gryffindor sensibilities never shied away from his lascivious proclivities.

~~~sshg~~~

Shortly after their eighty-second anniversary, Hermione had felt an unusual lump in her breast. Within the span of four months, her health had deteriorated so much she was bedridden. At first Severus spent all of his waking hours attempting to find a cure for the cancer that had lain latent in her Muggle DNA.

As Hermione entered into her final weeks, she begged him to accept the inevitable. She didn't want their time spent apart. He would stay at her side, coaxing her to eat, holding her through pain, laughing and crying as they relived their happiest memories together via Pensieve.

~~~sshg~~~

Severus gently pried the wax seal and pulled out the vellum card.

My dearest love,

It won't be long now. You have been so very strong and brave for me, and I regret I cannot repay you.

You have gifted me a full life, from childhood through now, and I would not trade it for any other. If my future holds reliving each day over and over again, I'll know I've earned my reward.

Know that I love you, Severus. Always and forever. I'll be waiting for you on the other side of the veil when you're ready.

Always,

Hermione.

~~~sshg~~~

As he opened the drawer beneath the cupboard, Severus carefully removed a small box tied with twine. Tea was ready and he was fatigued. The song of the fieldfares now mingled with the harsh call of a crow, and the sun was now to the point to streaming into the sitting room.

Slowly, Severus read the previous five letters he had received, each on a Valentine's Day following her death. His fingers glided over her script, and he brought the parchment close to inhale the lingering essence. If he concentrated hard enough, he could picture his Hermione sitting across from him.

~~~sshg~~~

The china teacup shattered as it hit the floor. Severus drew a deep gasp. The sharp knife that pierced his heart was great, but he had no desire to seek aid – whether by Floo or by potion. He could hear his blood pulse erratically in his left ear, then slowly recede to a soft *swish*.

It was time. Upon opening his eyes, his ethereal beauty stood before him with extended hands. The whisper barely broke from his lips. "I've missed you so much."

Hermione smiled. "The wait is over, my Prince, my love. Come, join me always."