

Love's Black Rose

by Emarys

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Chapter 1

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LOVE'S BLACK ROSE

In the silence of the night, darkness grew, covering the entire aging castle. Seeping into the farthest corners was a chill on the eve of the fulfillment of a prophecy long overdue.

It was in these dark, quiet hours that men and women, magical and non-magical alike, sought the comfort of their beds and friendly company. For one man it was a moment in which he took time to gaze upon the woman in his bed and in his heart. The soft glow coming from the dying coals in the grate warmed her skin. Golden, honey coloured tendrils splashed across his pillow, framing her face.

It almost made her look unreal, that glow emanating off the curls surrounding her relaxed face. Soft and serene, showing no signs of the turmoil lurking in the depths of her mind, but he could see it in her eyes. How he wished to see them one more time, wishing that fate had been kinder to him.

But it was not. He was a dark man, a marked man with a soul so black and shattered that it was a wonder he was even here. Yes, it was a cruel game fate was playing with him.

But still, she was here and she was his. It was but one more chance that he had been given one last time with her. This time would not be wasted. Oh no, it was with desire that he studied the sleeping woman beside him.

She was intelligent, witty, and beautiful, this woman he loved, and her fate, as well as his, lay within the hands of a boy who was barely a man.

It was with the grim thought that if he never lived to see the end of tomorrow, he would carry her image with him ingrained into his memory.

He began to study her face, every contour, fine hair and fading freckle. The soft curve of her eyelashes as they rested on the tops of her cheeks, the slightly rosy-pink colour of her lips, they were a succulent dessert to be savoured.

Picking up a loose eyelash from her cheek, he transfigured it into a black rose. Bringing the petals to his lips, he kissed it, pouring into it every feeling he had for Hermione, his whole heart carried in a kiss.

He then began to trace her features lightly with the rose. Down her nose across her cheeks that were still slightly flushed from their earlier lovemaking, along the edge of her jaw, the petals were silky and soft, mirroring the texture of her skin. Travelling down her neck to her breast, circling it and continuing down, dusting the underside of her breast with the tips of the petals, then back up and across her nipple circling it and moving on, farther down over the plain of her stomach, circling her navel and moving closer to her hip and along her curves...

He cupped her hip with the palm of his hand, crushing the rose between them. He slipped into the memories of their earlier moments of passion, and closed his eyes.

It had started on the settee. She had summoned tea from the house-elves as Severus had settled himself. She stood and brushed her hands off after being on the floor near the hearth.

Just as she sat down next to him, the tea arrived, and Severus leaned forward, preparing the cups--a drop of milk in his and no milk but two sugars in hers.

"Thank you," she said, as she always did when he fixed their tea. He couldn't bring himself to drink any.

"Severus," "Hermione," they both spoke at once. He paused, allowing her to speak first.

"Severus," she repeated. Severus looked at her, patiently waiting for her to continue "I... well, I know we've never said where we were, in our relationship but I'd like to have considered or still call you mine and..." There was a long pause. "I love you," she whispered.

Severus hadn't planned on going into that topic when he had started to speak earlier. But, this was something more important. This woman, whom he had let consume nearly all of his time away from teaching, even as a part of his research work, had just confessed her love.

He didn't know what to say! Was she the one he loved? He cared for her, yes. They had a great friendship; they could talk about anything and everything. She was his challenger and he hers. She was also a great partner in the lab, as well as in bed. But did that mean he was in love with her? If there was anything he was more certain of, he'd list them, but none were as clear to him as the one thought that took over his mind. "I love Hermione Granger."

He set his teacup down and took hers, placing it next to his, and did the only thing his mouth was capable of at that moment. He kissed her. He kissed her passionately and deeply, but delicately. Pulling away and breathing quickly from lack of air, he kept his eyes closed. Still leaning over her, just inches from her mouth, he said, "I love you, Hermione."

He opened his eyes and looked down into hers. She began to make quick work of undoing the buttons on his waistcoat and then doing the same with his shirt as it was revealed. Her hands were warm along his sides as she wrapped her arms around him and pulled him closer to her body.

He hadn't wanted to crush her, so as carefully as he could, he worked his arms under her and lifted her. Holding her close, he walked the short distance to the bedroom.

After placing her on the bed, he pulled off the already un-buttoned clothing and laid it across the dressing chair before making his way back to the bed. They lay there for some time just holding each other. There was no need for words or thoughts; he was holding the woman he loved and she loved him in return.

He had thought she had fallen asleep when she whispered, "Severus, make love to me." It wasn't a demand or a question but a wish.

His arm began to burn, bringing him back to the present. Opening his eyes, Severus cast one more glance at Hermione's sleeping form, and then slowly removed himself from her grasp.

As he pulled the rose away from her skin, there were a few drops of mixed blood binding them in body and soul. He kissed her one last time and then began to dress.

Pulling on the black clothing, his heart ached it had never ached before. It was as if someone was pulling at his chest; a tear ran down his pale cheek. Life was unfair.

He had to be strong. Taking a deep breath, he released his grip and the rose fell to the floor. Swiping the white mask off the dresser, he walked to the door and pulled it open forcefully then made to step through, but the ache only grew stronger.

"Curse that snake sucking bastard!" he swore to himself then turned back, picking up the rose and walking to the bedside table. He muttered a stasis charm, and then transfigured one of her hairpins into a glass case. Gently placing the rose inside and closing the top, drawing his wand and tracing a heart shape on the glass box, he gave a short flick to his wand and the glass glowed a warm yellow for a moment. When the light was gone a heart was etched into the case along with the words 'forever in my heart.'

His arm burned again, more painfully this time; he would be in more trouble if he didn't move now. One last glance at Hermione and he was out the door.

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Hermione woke to a pounding at the door and looked over to see if Severus was still there. The sheets were cold where he had been the night before. The pounding continued, followed by someone shouting.

She climbed out of bed, shrugged into her dressing gown, and walked to the door. Pulling it open, she came face to face with Harry and Ron.

"Mione, we've been looking all over for you! What the hell are you doing down here in HIS rooms?" Ron demanded.

"Never mind that; they're attacking the school! Death Eaters all over! It's begun! Let's go now." Harry grabbed her arm and began to pull her.

"Harry, wait! I'm not dressed, nor do I have my wand!" She sounded exasperated.

Harry took one glance at her then turned to leave. "Get dressed and get your damn wand, then meet us in the entrance hall," he shouted over his shoulder.

Hermione shut the door and ran for the bedroom, pulling on her clothes as fast as she could. Grabbing her wand off the bedside table, she took one last glance at the black rose in its case and muttered a prayer that they would make it through this battle--all of them.

Tapping her wand to her hair and casting a quick plait, she ran out the door, heading for the battle playing out above her head.