

Letting Go Is Never Easy

by Bora

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This set of (hopefully coherent) drabbles has been beta-ed by the lovely SW69, but any mistakes remain solely my own. All characters mentioned in the story belong to JKR & Co.

Success did not smell sweet, nor did it make him any more agreeable or kindly predisposed towards humankind. The ever persistent Scottish rain still bothered him as much as ever, the early blush-pale roses still conveyed a ridiculous romanticism, and the woman he desired was still engaged to someone else but him.

For he had listened to the age-old adagio of 'if you love someone, you set them free'. And although he'd never truly had her except as a friend, he'd still let her go. Seeing her sparkling eyes and infectious laughter was all he needed to know that her happiness would always exceed his own success.

Beautiful she was, and beautiful she remained, for in his dreams she never changed. Her eyes never dulled, her hair never grew grey, and no potions argument ever became permanent. Her laughter always tinkled, her hands were never afraid to touch him, and the skin of her neck wore the fragrance of soft lilac and hints of bergamot.

But every awakening was cruel, to never know if she would visit him again in times of need. When his lungs were struggling for oxygen, when eyes were bloodshot and every movement made him wish he were dead, she would appear and soothe his battered soul.

Slowly her dream presence bled over into his daily routine, and fantasy met reality. A rare book would become a possible Christmas gift, a holiday he had never cared for. The soft pink roses he had blasted to the underworld countless times after her engagement to the redheaded dolt were no longer destroyed after he had seen her finger one of the blooms and inhaling its delicate scent with a look of joy.

He had sought out that particular flower, and with the aid of a Stasis and Disillusionment Charm, now lay on his nightstand.

Weeks and months went by, and her presence turned stronger. Their friendship, which had returned to being tentative and unsure after her engagement, slowly seemed to grow back into a more substantial one reminiscent of before. But neither acknowledged it to be so.

For if they did, might it not mean that her marriage was not as strong as she had hoped? And perhaps if that were true, would he ever be able to stop his heart from hoping?

"I believe it is customary to wish one a happy birthday on an occasion such as this." It was a gift low in Galleon value, and therefore so much the more personal.

The *Daily Prophet* headlined with the news of the divorce. Even after all these years, their private lives still sold papers, and the more delicate and personal the information, the bigger the front-page fonts.

Neither Hermione nor her children were in the Great Hall when the owls brought the papers, and so they missed the looks passing between the professors, and the way Rose and Hugo's friends stood up for them in the face of gossip.

"Rose's mum is not sleeping with him! They're just good friends, that's all. And why should you care anyways. Just shut your gob and leave them alone."

When his lips kissed the skin of her smooth collarbone, her neck arched in bliss.

When her fingers stroked over his shoulder blade and the inherent scars, he exhaled harshly.

And as the moans and gasps and murmurs grew harsher and more urgent, she whispered she loved him.

As she stretched on the bed, soft sheets caressing her skin, a perfectly preserved blush-coloured rose caught her eye. "Have I ever thanked you properly for my birthday gift last year?"

She rolled over and stroked his cheek. "It's sitting on my nightstand as well. How long has this been here?"

Severus smiled slightly. "For as long as I have loved you."

A/N: As to what Severus gave Hermione as birthday gift; you are more than welcome to use your imagination. My own (rather limited) imagination came up with a rose similar to the one he acquired for himself.