



# The Passionate Pen

The Art  
of Writing  
Love Letters

By Anna Harrington



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## Why We Should Write

# Love Letters

A love letter is an act of faith. After all, you're offering a piece of your heart and hoping your intended feels the same. Loving someone can be frightening, overwhelming, and sometimes just plain confusing. But it can also be wonderful, making you feel special and alive. A love letter is a precious artifact of that love. If kept beyond the giving, a love letter is a reminder of a special time, place, and feeling, one that can be cherished for years to come.

They should make the one you love feel special and unique—and truly, isn't a letter that allows a glimpse into your heart exactly that? It can be an expression of love, a heartfelt apology, or just a simple message to say that you're thinking of the one you love.

What you decide to put into the letter is private and personal in the truest sense. It will be seen only by your intended and should be the purest expression of your feelings. It should be a reflection of the feelings that you two share—the presentation a reflection of the recipient, the content a glimpse into the sender's heart.

Above all, remember always that writing a love letter is an act of courage. We're offering our hearts and praying that the person who receives it will share those same feelings and reply in kind. We are making ourselves vulnerable to wounding but also opening ourselves to wonderful opportunities.

## The Presentation...

*Love is in the Eye  
of the Beholder.*

So...where to begin? A good place to start is to think about how the letter will look physically, apart from the content.

An often overlooked part of writing a love letter is the appearance of the letter itself. This is an important part of the process that should not be underestimated. Presentation sets the tone for the entire letter, and it says nearly as much about how much time and care you took with the letter as the words you wrote inside it.

Before you begin writing, give careful thought to how you want your letter to look. What kind and color of paper will you use—cream linen, satin pink, or a piece of Victorian wallpaper? Will you use scented paper? An envelope? Seal or no seal? Will you use a fountain pen or glitter pen, black ink or colored pencils?

There are two points to consider.

**F**IRST, what tone do you want to set? Do you want the flowery poetry kind of romantic? Do you want to evoke a specific memory that the two of you shared? Country chic or rock-n-roll? Are you hoping to make the receiver laugh at a shared joke or amusing story? Or do you simply want the recipient to know that you're thinking about him or her as you go about your day? (Sometimes, the most poignant love letters are the simplest.) Tone often comes from the type of sentiment you want to convey. Are you giving a formal declaration of your love? Then go the classically romantic route, complete with fancy paper and seal. Want to share a special day or event with your loved one? Perhaps a simpler, sweeter letter would be best. Want to say *Just thinking of you* or a simple *I love you*? Then a quirky letter might be the better choice.

**N**EXT, the presentation should be a reflection of the one you love. Knowing the recipient well, keep in mind what he or she likes or would find special. As you make your decisions, keep asking yourself—What is my recipient's perfect love letter? What does he or she expect a love letter? Or what would be completely unexpected, yet the most special presentation of it?

**S**ome ideas to help you decide...

# Poetry & Romance

For a traditionally romantic love letter—one that makes you think of poetry, roses, and candlelight—you'll want to go with the classical.

## *Ink* –

Black fountain pen, rolling ball (medium or thick tip) or felt-tip pen (extra fine tip); the solidity of the line created by one of these pens lends a sense of timelessness and permanence. Color: most likely black, although a dark blue might also work, depending upon the color of paper (black with white or ivory, blue with soft pink or yellow). Nothing will help put you into the romantic mood quite like using a fountain pen, but practice at lot with it first before you write your letter.

## *Paper* –

High quality paper is a must to set a classically romantic tone. A stationery shop or high end office supply store will sell high quality paper, sometimes by the sheet. Look for a heavy stock (but not card stock—you'll most likely want to fold it for delivery); a variety of surfaces might be available, everything from rolled imprints to linen to satin. Keep the type of pen you'll be using in mind when you select a surface. Fountain pen ink does not work well on overly porous or satin-finished surfaces; a felt pen works on most surfaces, but the line might blur if the paper is overly porous. Whatever paper you select, buy several sheets. You will need to try out the pen and ink, and you will most likely be nervous enough to make lots of mistakes.

# Special Touches

## *Scent:*

You might consider purchasing scented paper or putting a scent onto the paper. Do not apply directly to the paper. Put the perfume, essential oil, etc. on your fingertip, then lightly trace the edge or the back of the piece of paper and let it dry completely before you write the letter.

## *Seal:*

A wax seal is a very romantic touch. You can purchase wax seal kits at stationery shops and crafts stores. An unusual but special way to seal the letter is with ribbon, but make certain that you punch the holes into the paper first before writing on it.

## *Special gifts:*

You can also include small tokens of affection, such as a pressed flower or a piece of ribbon or lace. What matters is the special thought behind the token, not the cost of it. In fact, be careful of including more expensive gifts, such as tickets to a special event or pieces of jewelry; if you add gifts like these, you will want to make certain that the letter is delivered intact and most likely personally.

# Sweet and Simple

While less formal than the classically romantic love letters, these are tinged with playfulness but are still recognizable as what we consider a traditional letter. Less formal, more relaxed...instead of roses and poetry, think wildflowers and song lyrics.

## **Ink –**

Stay with black and dark blue. While you do not have to use a fountain pen (but you can), look for a pen that gives you a solid and fairly strong line. However, no pencil or ballpoint pens.

## **Paper –**

This is your chance to think outside the traditional stationery box. While you can certainly still buy high end paper, most stationery shops also sell paper with flowers, swirls, hearts, etc. You can also try writing on the back of a vintage valentine, a piece of wallpaper, a paper doily—the ideas are endless. Just concentrate on sweet and simple.

## **Special Touches –**

*Envelope:* Because this isn't a traditionally romantic love letter, a seal would look far too formal and out of place. Instead, you'll need an envelope or some other way to seal up the letter. Try a ribbon bow, a length of lace, or a piece of raffia—just make certain it goes with the look of the paper and keeps your letter private.

*Special gifts:* Again, think sweet and simple. For example, instead of a pressed rose, try a pressed daisy or a fresh dandelion, include a few lines of song lyrics on a separate slip of paper, etc.



# Quirky (Yet Special)

All the rules go out the window! This is your chance to reflect on how unique your loved one is, to highlight his or her individuality, hobbies, or passions. While love letters like these work best as everyday reminders of your love rather than as a grand declaration, they can be just as special.

**INK** – Gel pens, glitter pens, crayons—anything goes! Just make certain that it doesn't smudge on whatever paper you decide to use and that it's legible on the paper, especially if you use some kind of unusual paper.

***Special Touches*** - You probably will not need many extras to go into this type of love letter, as the letter's presentation itself should not be overshadowed. If you are going to include gifts, make certain that they match the tone of the valentine—white plastic snow inside the snowflake that will fall out when it's opened, tickets to an afternoon matinee movie, put a baseball card inside a box of Cracker Jack. . .the possibilities are endless!

# QUIRKY PAPER

**W**HILE YOU CAN PASS on fancy stationery for a quirky letter, you still need to give consideration to exactly what message you're sending by choosing the right kind of paper. Make your choice of paper as unique as the one you love.

A sports fan? Write a quick I love you on a baseball card.

Writing in wintertime? Cut a snowflake out of white paper, leaving room in the center to write your letter (fold it back up, hiding the message, then write OPEN ME on the outside).

Nearing St. Valentine's Day? Buy a box of those cheap, one-sided valentines that kids hands out in kindergarten class, write a little one-sentence note on the back of each, and deliver one each day until February 14th.

A movie fan? Buy an old movie poster and write your letter on the back, then roll it up to deliver it.

A musician? Write your letter on old LP liner notes.

Make your own home-made paper out of construction paper, paper doilies, stickers, lace—whatever you have on hand.

But whatever paper you choose, make certain that it's about the recipient, *not* about you.

## TIPS:

- ♥ Write out what you want to say first, then transfer it to the final paper.
- ♥ To keep from writing at an angle, trace lines on a ruled sheet of notebook paper with a black permanent marker, then place it beneath the sheet of stationery. Unless your paper is very thick, the lines should show through, showing you where to write.
- ♥ If your paper is too thick for the magic marker trick, use a ruler and very lightly trace lines in pencil across the paper. After you write the letter and the ink dries, gently erase the lines.
- ♥ Do not use a ball point pen, even on casual or simple notes. It's thin, weak, wimpy—three things you do not want your loved one to associate with your love letter.
- ♥ Start by thinking of what your loved one would like most and what would fit his or her personality. Then go from there.
- ♥ Do not over think your letter or worry too much about it. The fact that you are writing a love letter in the first place is what matters most. The rest is simply (delicious!) icing.

Whatever you choose for your love letter, always keep in mind the person to whom you are writing. The choices you make in choosing the materials themselves should be a reflection *not* of your feelings as the writer—but of the loved one receiving the letter. Think of the entire letter as a tango, a slow and romantic dance, and all tangos require two people. So does a love letter. The final product will be a tango realized, with the materials reflecting the intended and the content a reflection of the sender's heart.

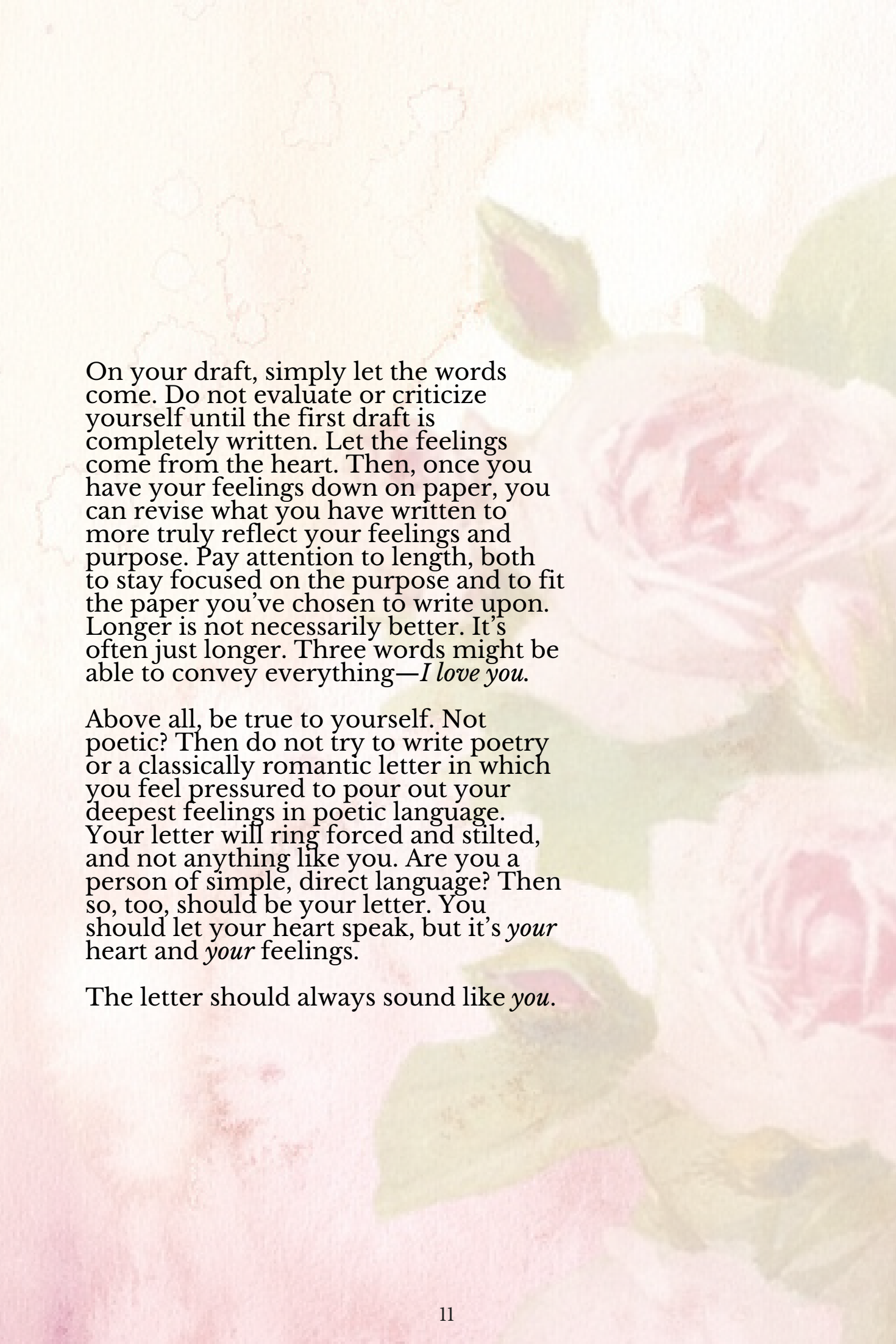
## Writing from the Heart...

# The Content

This is the hardest part of writing a love letter—when you put your heart into words. It might seem silly to put your feelings onto paper, ridiculous, or even impossible. But it is none of those things. It is a recognition of how special your loved one is, an acknowledgment of your feelings, an affirmation that he or she is in your thoughts...and sometimes an apology or request. But always, it's earnest and honest.

The presentation was about the recipient. The content is purely about *you*.

Before you put pen to paper, ask yourself—*why am I writing this letter?* What is the message that you want to convey? Do you want to declare your love, simply remind him or her that you are thinking of them, arrange a special event, or apologize? Write that purpose in one concise sentence at the top of the page of your scratch paper. Then write out what you want to say about that purpose. The key is to keep to only one purpose per letter. More than one, and you are risking emotionally overwhelming your loved one. (And wouldn't it be lovely to be able to write more than one letter, if you have more than one purpose?)



On your draft, simply let the words come. Do not evaluate or criticize yourself until the first draft is completely written. Let the feelings come from the heart. Then, once you have your feelings down on paper, you can revise what you have written to more truly reflect your feelings and purpose. Pay attention to length, both to stay focused on the purpose and to fit the paper you've chosen to write upon. Longer is not necessarily better. It's often just longer. Three words might be able to convey everything—*I love you*.

Above all, be true to yourself. Not poetic? Then do not try to write poetry or a classically romantic letter in which you feel pressured to pour out your deepest feelings in poetic language. Your letter will ring forced and stilted, and not anything like you. Are you a person of simple, direct language? Then so, too, should be your letter. You should let your heart speak, but it's *your* heart and *your* feelings.

The letter should always sound like *you*.

## *The Delivery...*



## *How to Send Your Heart*

The last decision you will need to make concerning your letter is how to place it into the hands of your beloved. Will you send it along with a dozen roses or a bouquet of balloons? Will you leave it on her pillow or on the seat of his car? Tuck it into his briefcase or into her purse? Will you play music, stage a romantic dinner, or simply hand it over with a kiss?

While all this takes forethought and planning, it is also the easiest of the decisions to make regarding your letter, as much of it has most likely already been decided for you, based upon the type of letter you wrote. You will want to match the formality of the delivery with the level of formality of the letter.

A formal love letter in the classical tradition requires a more formal delivery. You could include it with a dozen roses delivered to her front door or slide it across the table during a romantic dinner. You could place it in a special place where you know that it will be found and when, or simply hand it over in person. The delivery should be a fairly serious experience, matching the seriousness of the letter. This is not a letter to deliver with balloons or stuffed animals. For a formal love letter, which usually contains a more serious purpose, you will also want to know exactly when your letter has been received and read.

Delivering a quirky and fun letter can be equally as fun as the letter itself, but the delivery needs to be as unusual and unique as the letter. This is not the kind of letter that you want to hand over during a candlelight dinner or during a dance in front of the fire. This letter should be tucked into her favorite pair of shoes, a coat pocket, or a lingerie drawer. Float it over to him on a helium balloon. Tie it to the dog's collar and let Fido deliver it. As with the different types of paper and ideas behind it, these fun delivery methods can be endless.

While it's tempting to create a grand delivery, do not let the delivery overshadow the letter. Delivery should enhance the experience, not *be* the experience.



## *Sweet Inspiration...*

If you're looking for a little inspiration to begin writing your love letter, hopefully these following examples will help stir your creativity and break through your inhibitions.



"Since I left you, I have been constantly depressed. My happiness is to be near you. Incessantly I live over in my memory your caresses, your tears, your affectionate solicitude. The charms of the incomparable Josephine kindle continually a burning and a glowing flame in my heart.... I thought that I loved you months ago, but since my separation from you I feel that I love you a thousand fold more. Each day since I knew you, have I adored you more and more."

-- *Napoleon to Josephine*

"We get old and get used to each other. We think alike. We read each other's minds. We know what the other one wants without asking. Sometimes we irritate each other a little bit. Maybe sometimes take each other for granted. But once in a while, like today, I meditate on it and realize how lucky I am to share my life with the greatest woman I ever met. You still fascinate and inspire me. You influence me for the better. You're the object of my desire, the #1 earthly reason for my existence. I love you very much. Happy birthday, princess."

-- *Johnny Cash to June Carter Cash  
in celebration of her birthday*

"Though still in bed, my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved, Be calm—love me—today—yesterday—what tearful longings for you—you—you—my life—my all—farewell. Oh continue to love me—never misjudge the most faithful heart of your beloved. Ever thine. Ever mine. Ever ours."

-- *Beethoven to his "immortal beloved,"  
whose identity is still unknown*

*"If only I were a clever woman, I could describe to you my gorgeous bird, how you unite in yourself the beauties of form, plumage, and song!*

*I would tell you that you are the greatest marvel of all ages, and I should only be speaking the simple truth. But to put all this into suitable words, my superb one, I should require a voice far more harmonious than that which is bestowed upon my species – for I am the humble owl that you mocked at only lately, therefore, it cannot be.*

*I will not tell you to what degree you are dazzling and to the birds of sweet song who, as you know, are none the less beautiful and appreciative.*

*I am content to delegate to them the duty of watching, listening and admiring, while to myself I reserve the right of loving; this may be less attractive to the ear, but it is sweeter far to the heart.*

*I love you, I love you. my Victor; I can not reiterate it too often; I can never express it as much as I feel it.*

*I recognise you in all the beauty that surrounds me in form, in colour, in perfume, in harmonious sound; all of these mean you to me. You are superior to all. I see and admire – you are all!*

*You are not only the solar spectrum with the seven luminous colours, but the sun himself, that illumines, warms, and revivifies! This is what you are, and I am the lowly woman that adores you."*

*-- Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo*

*"My blind eyes are desperately waiting for the sight of you. You don't realize of course, E.B., how fascinatingly beautiful you have always been, and how strangely you have acquired an added and special and dangerous loveliness."*

*-- Richard Burton to Elizabeth Taylor*

*"Dear St. Valentine,*

*I'm writing to you about a beautiful young lady who has been in this household for 25 years now—come March 4.*

*I have a request to make of you but before doing so feel you should know more about her. For one thing she has 2 hearts—her own and mine. I'm not complaining. I gave her mine willingly, and like it right where it is. Her name is Nancy but for some time now I've called her Mommie and don't believe I could change.*

*My request of you is—could you on this day whisper in her ear that someone loves her very much and more and more each day? Also tell her, this "Someone" would run down like a dollar clock without her so she must always stay where she is."*

*-- Ronald Reagan to Nancy Reagan*

“My darling Clemmie, in your letter from Madras you wrote some words very dear to me, about having enriched your life. I cannot tell you what pleasure this gave me, because I always feel so overwhelmingly in your debt, if there can be accounts in love...What it has been to me to live all these years in your heart and companionship no phrases can convey.”

-- *Churchill to his wife Clementine*

*Jerry Orbach (the actor from Law and Order) used to leave love poems for his wife every morning next to her coffee. Here is one:*

“Valentine’s Day is here again. The weather looks cold and clammy...But I can happily go to work and try not to act too hammy. Cause I’ve got a warmness in my heart from my sunshine, my lifeline, my lambie! (I wish I could stay home and vie you a kiss!) xxx’s Jer”



## About Anna

Anna Harrington is an award-winning author of Regency romances, filled with independent heroines and dashing heroes, plenty of romance, and a guaranteed happily ever after. When she isn't writing, she loves to travel, hike, and work with her roses in her garden.

She loves to hear from her readers and can be found at:

Webpage -- [www.AnnaHarringtonBooks.com](http://www.AnnaHarringtonBooks.com)

Amazon -- <http://ow.ly/4VNv30c1qQz>

FB -- <http://bit.ly/2C9l2U9>

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