

~ Valentine Day ~

love letters

{An original yarn fiction by Anj Medhurst}

Valentine loves letters. The clever ways they join together; into words, sentences, paragraphs, pages - into life stories and love stories.

‘Your turn Val, what have you got up your sleeve, eh? What’s that smirk all about?’

He picks the tiles up off the wooden rack, smiles at George and carefully lays the letters down on the board.

‘Juiced. On a triple word, D on a double letter. I make that 54. Got that George, need a hand with the arithmetic?’

George sighs but he’s smiling as he adds 54 to Valentine’s already impressive score.

‘I don’t know how you do it Val. The luck of the board is always with you, isn’t it?’

Valentine shrugs, picks up five tiles and shuffles them on the rack. He loves the patterns they make, the multitudes they contain, the endless possibilities.

Twenty minutes later, he pulls his hat firmly down over his ears as he stands on the front step. ‘Same time next week?’ he says, shaking George’s hand firmly and looking suitably bashful as he heads towards the garden gate.

‘Why not?’ George shakes his head and smiles wryly, ‘I might get the better of you one day, you never know!’.

Later that evening Valentine poaches an egg, butters some toast and folds the newspaper into quarters next to his plate - crossword uppermost. He has tried

completing the daily cryptic on his iPad but it's not the same. He likes scribbling his workings in the margins, making little circles of letters from the words that might be anagrams. Pencilling in the answers he can't quite parse until the penny drops and he can deploy his trusty blue Bic biro, forming the block capitals carefully, reappraising the new crossers, taking a swig of tea and brushing toast crumbs from the table cloth.

The following morning, he artfully inscribes a letter J (for Java) in his coffee foam, drizzles maple syrup (he's coming round to the modern notion that Y might be the sixth vowel) on his porridge and opens the daily Wordle on his phone. ADORE is currently his opening gambit. Three vowels, two of the most common consonants. He reaches HEADY via DEATH in three moves and pleased with adding to his current streak he washes his breakfast crockery, ties his shoelaces, pops the envelopes that are stacked on the telephone table into his inside pocket, and sets off on his daily walk, via the local parade of shops.

His suburb has become increasingly cosmopolitan in recent years and in addition to the launderette (a word he had long-imagined was from a romantic French root but it turned out was actually a trademark from the 1940s) it now has a Bodega (Spanish by way of Latin) and a patisserie (actually French), as well as a hardware store called Cooper's that he was amazed to discover was actually established by the local barrel-maker in 1878 (when the town still had twelve public houses and a brewery).

'Morning Val, First or Second?' Pat has her fingers poised above the keyboard as Valentine riffles through the letters he's just retrieved from his jacket pocket.

'First please, Pat. I'm feeling flush today.' He winks jauntily, as Pat the post-mistress prints off the stamps for him. It's not quite the same as the big ledger of colourful perforated rectangles - and he still insists on 'the real thing' if

there are Christmas editions or a Royal celebration being marked - but the new-fangled barcoded stickers seem to do the job just as well and his letters arrive promptly. Over the years, Valentine's love of letters has led him to amass quite a collection of pen pals. And while many of them send him printed pages, or even emails, by way of return he still takes time to handwrite his news and chit-chat. His handwriting is actually a bit on the scruffy side and he isn't above the occasional crossing-out when he realises he hasn't used quite the right word but he just loves the way the letters flow out of the pen.

He stops to look at the notice board on the way out of the post office. Cards detailing local plumbers, dog-walkers, and tree surgeons mingle with adverts for evening classes at the local college, and Salsa dancing classes at the community centre;

“Do you love the Pottery Throwdown?”

asks an A4 poster,

“Are you keen to play with clay?

(Could you make Keith cry?)

Ceramics classes with Celia every Wednesday afternoon.

Email for more info.”

And George regularly regales Valentine with his Tuesday evening Tango exploits. He is, by all accounts a very proficient dancer these days, his Ochos and Pasadas making him an in-demand partner. His chancing upon the advert on this very board a couple of years back really did give him a whole new lease of life...

Valentine lets himself back into his little porch and picks up the post scattered across the doormat. A letter postmarked Edinburgh (interesting), something from his bank (probably unnecessary), and a handful of flyers for pizza delivery services, water softeners, and pre-paid funeral plans. His brain instantly starts

playing around with the letters (everything is an anagram if you know how to look). **'Why not call Flashy Car Valeting Services!'** twists and turns in his head and a myriad of alternative meanings slowly reveal themselves; *I crave your love, when shall night fall... erm... upon us?*

He can see there is still a little bit of magic to muster but he is on to something. And wouldn't the world be a happier place if all the junk mail turned into love letters?

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