

# Adelaide's Fever Confession

## *A Short Story*

*(Contains spoilers for Staff of Nightfall and SMB Vol. II)*

Regulus pressed the back of his hand against Adelaide's feverish forehead and frowned. "Can't you just heal yourself?"

Adelaide scowled. "Why didn't I think of that? Oh, right, I already *tried*."

Regulus stifled a sigh. It was the first time Adelaide had fallen ill since they'd been married over a year ago. Thinking she could heal herself had seemed perfectly logical to him. Adelaide sank deeper into her mound of pillows as her annoyed expression softened.

"It's just...it's *everywhere*," she explained. "Every part of my body. And I'm so tired, I can't focus the energy. I've never been able to heal myself of sickness. It's like my magic is already being drained away to heal me and can't do anything more." She chewed on her lower lip. "That's probably why that time when my whole family caught a coughing sickness mine was the mildest and lasted the shortest time."

"Well," Regulus said hopefully, "that means you'll probably be better in no time, right?"

"I want to be better *now*." Her lower lip jutted out in a pout, and it was all Regulus could do not to laugh. Still, worry consumed his mind.

Adelaide had awoken early that morning with an aching body, stuffed up nose, and fever which had only gotten worse as the morning progressed. She looked paler than her usual warm brown complexion, and she'd spent the day under a pile of blankets and furs while Regulus brought her tea and broth, sat next to the bed and read to her, and generally fretted.

Tamina had told him to relax. It was just a common cold season malady, nothing to fret over. He'd told Tamina she was right, and logically, he knew he'd survived similar bouts, as had Dresden. But what he hadn't told Tamina was that that his mother's illness had started like this, but then it moved to her lungs, where it never left, and eventually...

Regulus swallowed and grabbed the cloth from the nearby bowl of cool water to wipe Adelaide's forehead and hoped his wife didn't notice that his hands were shaking. He wouldn't go there. Adelaide was strong and otherwise healthy, and like she said, her magic was helping fight the sickness.

"Do you want anything? More broth? Warmed mead? Me to—"

"Really, Regulus, for all my moaning and groaning, I'm all right." Adelaide smiled, but it was weak and emphasized the dark circles under her eyes. "I think I just need to sleep for a while."

"All right." Regulus kissed her forehead and rose from his chair next to their bed.

Adelaide's breathing deepened as he drew the curtains around the four-poster bed. He stoked the fire and quietly headed out, looking for a distraction.

He was only able to make it through half a game of checkers with Dresden before he became too agitated to focus.

"I'm going to go check on Adelaide." Regulus stood, and Dresden slumped back in his chair with a dramatic groan.

"She's fine, Reg. There's nothing you can do to help her. Just let her rest."

"I know, I just..." He looked helplessly toward the door.

He hated that Dresden was right. Checking on Adelaide wouldn't make her get better any faster, but he was going to lose his mind sitting around. He needed to do *something*, to feel like he was at least trying.

Dresden sighed and waved his hand. "You've always been such a nursemaid. Go on."

Regulus nodded and rushed back up to their room. Adelaide was still asleep, one arm out of the blankets. When he felt her forehead, he could swear she had grown even more fevered. Sweat beaded on her face. He wiped it away with the damp cloth, unease knotting his stomach. She stirred under the pile of blankets and her eyelids fluttered.

"How are you?" Regulus whispered.

Adelaide's eyes opened, tired and unfocused. "Regulus."

He clasped her hand and sat down. "Yes?"

She took a deep breath and shifted again, her eyes closing. "You never wrote to me again," she mumbled.

"What?"

"I like your letters." Her voice was scratchy, and her words slurred together. "Why don't you send me letters anymore?"

"We're married," he protested, baffled. "I don't have to write to you to tell you I love you. I tell you in person every day, no letters required."

"You don't want to write me a love letter?" Adelaide tossed over, pulling her hand out of his and under the blankets.

A pang of hurt went through Regulus, even though he knew that was ridiculous. She was just overly tired and feverish.

"I don't think Regulus likes me anymore," she mumbled. "He hasn't written to me."

Regulus blinked. “Ad...who are you talking to?”

“Yes, he *is* stupid.”

His mouth fell open. “Adelaide, are you awake?”

“I don’t know why he doesn’t like me. His letters were so sweet, but he stopped writing them...”

Regulus stood and leaned over her, trying to see her face. “Adelaide, *mareh piahre*, I married you!” He brushed some loose strands of hair from her messy braid away from her sweat-slicked cheek.

Her eyes remained closed as she breathed in and out slowly. Regulus backed away and paced next to the bed, chewing on his thumbnail.

“No, the forks can’t dance.” She giggled. “They have no feet.”

Regulus snorted before he ran from the room. He nearly knocked over Harold and shouted an apology over his shoulder as he stumbled down a cold stone hall to Tamina’s room. Only at the last minute did he think to knock instead of simply throwing the door open. He rapped on the door, his agitation growing. And what exactly did he think Tamina could do? Well, she was a mother, and mothers seemed to just know what to do sometimes.

Tamina pulled open her door with a huff. “What under the skies, Regulus?”

“Adelaide, she’s, she’s—well, she’s mad at me for not writing her love letters, and she’s burning up, and she’s talking about dancing forks.” His shoulders hunched. “I’m worried.”

“Dancing forks?” Tamina lifted an eyebrow.

“Actually, she says they can’t dance.” A chuckle escaped him. “Since they don’t have feet.”

Tamina laughed. “She’s not wrong.” She met Regulus’ eyes. “It’s common for people to be nonsensical and confused when they have a fever. She’s only been ill a day, and I’ve never known her to be ill longer than two. Give her some more time.”

“But—”

“Just make sure she drinks something every time she’s awake.” Tamina rubbed his upper arm. “She’s not going anywhere, Regulus,” she added softly.

Regulus stiffened, then slumped against the wall next to Tamina’s door. “I just want her well,” he whispered.

“I know.” Tamina patted his cheek. It was an odd, motherly gesture, and Regulus didn’t know how to react to it. “Maybe you should get some rest, too. In a spare room. We don’t need you falling ill, too.” She went back into her room, leaving him alone in the hallway.

He knew she was probably right. But he didn’t like the thought of leaving Adelaide alone. He’d promised her he wouldn’t do so ever again. And if that meant he came down with a fever, too, so be it.

Adelaide was sound asleep when he returned to their room. Regulus opened the curtain over the window. Gray light from the overcast late autumn day spilled into the room, providing just enough light to his desk for his purpose. He sat down and began to write.

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Despite his fears, Adelaide had much improved by the following morning. By evening, she was her usual self, full of energy, her magic strong as ever. She joined everyone else for supper in the great hall and ate like she’d been starved. Which, he supposed, a couple days of mostly water and broth would leave a person hungry.

Late that night, they sat next to each other in bed, Regulus with one arm around Adelaide's shoulders. Adelaide was focused on the book in her hands, one of the volumes on magic that Tamina had pulled out of hiding at Belanger castle. Regulus watched the flames in the fireplace, enjoying the quiet and basking in the relief of Adelaide's quick return to health. Finally, he pulled his arm from around his shoulders and climbed out of the bed.

"Where are you going?" Adelaide tucked the ribbon sewn into the spine of the book between the pages and shut the volume as she looked up at him with concern.

"I have something for you." He crossed to his desk, pulled out the top drawer, and plucked out the neatly folded piece of parchment tied with a thin ribbon.

She sat up straighter as he came back to the bed, turning a little toward him while he settled back under the covers.

"You mentioned I haven't written you any letters."

Adelaide's eyebrows pinched. She looked down at the letter in his hand and up at him. "I what?"

Oh. She didn't even remember.

Regulus ducked his head, not making eye contact. "When you were sick...you were upset with me for not writing you any more love letters."

"I..." Adelaide laughed. She hugged his arm and leaned her head on his shoulder. "Oh, Regulus, I don't need you to write me a love letter to know how you feel. It was the fever."

"True. You did also mention that forks don't have feet."

Adelaide's nose scrunched. "What?"

He chuckled and kissed the top of her head. "Still. Here." He awkwardly held up the letter.

Adelaide released his arm to take the letter, then shifted so she was leaning against his side. She pulled off the ribbon and gently unfolded the letter.

“Dearest Adelaide—”

Regulus started. “Oh, no, you really don’t have to read it out loud, in fact—”

“Hush you; I’m reading a letter from my lover.”

Regulus’ face heated, but he kept his mouth shut as she continued to read aloud.

“Dearest Adelaide, You’re right. You probably know you’re right; you usually are, after all.” She looked up at him. “Usually?”

“You’re only human.” He winked, and Adelaide rolled her eyes, but she still smiled.

“Being married is no reason for me to stop writing you letters, especially if you like them so much. Although I’m truly terrible at them, so that should be reason to stop.” She kissed his cheek. “Aw, Reg, no, you’re not.”

Regulus cleared his throat. “Well, you haven’t even finished this one yet. And you have no idea how I agonized over every letter I sent you. Dresden was nearly ready to strangle me.”

Adelaide laughed and returned to the letter. “But you want a letter, and I can never tell you no. Adelaide, love of my life, my wife. Your eyes are beautiful. If there are eyes more captivating in this world, I have never seen them, but I doubt they exist.”

The back of Regulus’ neck heated. Hearing his pathetic words from Adelaide’s mouth only made them seem more ridiculous.

“I would rather taste your lips than sample the richest delicacies the entire world has to offer. I’d rather touch your skin than finest silks. Your voice enchants me. Your kindness destroys me. You look at me, and I am undone. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you. With all my heart and love, yours forever, Regulus.”

Regulus winced, bracing himself for her amusement or confusion. For a moment that dragged on so long he was about to beg her to forget about the letter, Adelaide was quiet.

“You’re really much better at this than you think, *mareh piahre*,” she murmured.

She refolded the letter and set it on the stand next to her side of the bed, safely away from the candle, and turned back toward him. She gave him a long, unreadable look.

He shifted, unsure what to do or say now. “I know it was inelegant and—”

“It was perfect.” She leaned toward him, a spark of mischief in her dark brown eyes.

“So...you want to kiss me, do you? Scandalous.”

Regulus smirked. “Who ever heard of such a thing? A man kissing his wife.” He leaned forward to close the distance between them, but Adelaide stopped him with her fingers against his lips. He frowned in silent question.

“Promise me you won’t stop writing me love letters?” She lowered her hand away from his mouth.

“If they make you happy, I’ll write you letters all the time.”

Adelaide grinned. “Come taste my lips then, *piahre*.”

With a smirk, Regulus scooped his wife into his arms.

Her fever may have terrified him, but without it, he may have never realized how much Adelaide liked his ridiculous love letters. And it seemed she *really* liked them.

Oh, he would most certainly write her many, many more.