

Lovers in a Time of War (July 1625)

Abstract

Families begin with marriages, and marriages often begin with lovers. Letters between young people are rare, letters between young lovers rarer still. In 1625, a young woman in the town of Schmalkalden (then in the Landgraviate of Hesse, since 1944 in Thuringia) composed this letter to her boyfriend, a soldier by the name of Hans Merten. Off at war, he had sent her a lock of his hair, which, as she explains below, she bound together with golden thread. Her sister, it seems, also likes Hans. The writer takes no notice of the war, which had begun in Bohemia and Austria in 1618-19 and had resulted by this time in a near-total victory for the Catholic forces. Instead, she and her sister ask for presents.

Source

Dearest to my heart, a thousand times my darling, Hans Merten,

I wish you as many hundred thousand good nights as there are stars in the heavens between you and me, and I also send you as many hundred thousand good nights from my sister Osanna. She says you should also think of her, and no hour passes without her thinking of you. I also greet you from all my siblings, father, and mother, all together.

My dearest Hans Merten, the lock of hair which you sent me, I have sewn up with gold-colored silk and wear around my right arm. Otherwise I have no amusement other than your dog. When he thinks that it is getting to be evening, he runs into our room and lies down under my bed at the head. When morning breaks, he does not get up until we get up. My dearest-to-my-heart darling, I humbly beg you, for the sake of God, to kindly send me something. Then the burghers here will gossip without end about the 5 Hungarian gulden you've sent me. And so I ask you completely humbly to kindly send me something, me and my sister especially.

Source of original German letter: Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, M 1 (Nachlaß Landau)–Nr. 725.

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