

It was midday when you finally finished setting up your Valentine's Day gift for Ash. It was nothing special, but getting that ribbon to look perfect took much longer than you'd care to admit. You'd gotten him a cute mug shaped exactly like an empty flower pot and a trowel-shaped spoon to match, with cute print stating '*Gardener of the Year*' on the front. Inside said mug was a package of herbs and leaves for Ash's favorite type of tea. The mug was wrapped in simple yellow wrapping paper with daisies on it. And to top it off, the healthiest rose you could muster up in your backyard. It was a bit more pink than the classic red rose, but it was alive! You even added a little handwritten note saying '*You're my favorite bud*'.

Not too shabby, if you say so yourself.

After you carefully placed the items in a basket to safely carry them to the skeleton family's household, you noticed that you had a text message you'd missed. A part of you screamed in despair when you realized the pending texts were from Ash.

*'heya. do ya wanna come over?'*

*'it's a human holiday today, right?'*

*'we could talk while i work if you wanna'*

*'i dunno what humans do on "valentines day"'*

You couldn't believe you'd left him on delivered for a whole 12 minutes! How could you?!

*' Hey! I'd love to hang out with you! You know that! <3'*

*' In fact, I actually have something to give you, so this works out great!''*

*‘ If that offer is still up, I can be over in 2 minutes!’*

You tidied up the basket a little while waiting for his reply. After a third try of trying to wind the ribbon around the handle to make it look prettier, you gave up.

*‘ the offer is always up’*

That’s all the clarification you needed to throw on a sweater, grab his little basket, and head out the door with a pep in your step. It was a little nippy, but luckily the sweater helped to block out the breeze.

Once you’d arrived on the doorstep, you scuffed off the debris from your shoes to avoid the wrath of half the family. Then, you bumped the door open with your hip. You announced your arrival to the house before the sweet smell of something like honey hit your nose, and you followed the trail all the way to the kitchen.

Ash stood in the kitchen with a large pot of something boiling on the stove as he bustled to and fro with a few other tasks. He seemed to be trying to tap some colorful powder onto a sheet of paper.

“Hey, you.” You smiled, gently setting the basket on the empty counter space. You made sure to avoid tipping over the vase of colorful flowers, some of which you didn’t recognize. Ash paused and turned his head to face you, his face perking up in the softest way.

“Heya. Sorry, didn’t hear you come in.” He tapped the rest of the powder onto the paper.

You sauntered up behind him and peered over his shoulder. “Whatcha got there? Chalk?”

The skeleton chuckled and shook his head. “No, it’s paint. The base of it.”

“Paint? Isn’t that supposed to be a liquid? Or something?” You scratched your cheek with a confused hum.

Ash gently folded the paper to pour the green powder into a glass vial. “When you add a binder to it, it turns into a nice watercolor paint. They’re for Poplar. He said he was running low on a few colors.”

You gasped and grinned. “Aww! I didn’t know you could make paint!” He slid over to the stove and peered over the top, which you realized was where that sweet smell was coming from. “Is that what this is?”

Ash set the topped vial aside next to a yellow one and nodded. “Mhm. It’s pea flower. If I did it right, it should make a nice teal.” He massaged his palm a bit with his thumb. Clearly, he’d been at this for a second.

“What do you gotta do next?” You asked, wafting the nice smell of the boiling pea flower toward you. The color looked really pretty from what you could tell.

The skeleton sighed. “I gotta pour that stuff into a separate jar and add some alum and washing soda, then strain it through a filter to catch the pigment, and then let it dry out.” He pointed to the sink where a jar tied off with a few filters sat. He seemed exhausted just explaining the process.

“Pour the whole thing into the jar?” You confirmed, and grabbed the oven mitts before Ash could.

He blinked. "Yeah..."

You turned off the stove and smiled. "Go look at what I got you, I can do this." You reassured and slowly waddled over to the jars.

"Are you sure? Ya don't have to do that..."

"Yep! Go take a little break." You pointed at some small containers set aside. "Is this the stuff I gotta pour in?" Once he confirmed, you shooed him off one final time before carefully pouring the contents into the jar. Seeing the light shine through really made the pretty color pop. You couldn't wait to see how it would look in Poplar's future paintings.

Once you set the empty pot aside in the sink, you poured in the alum, then the washing soda, the crinkling of wrapping paper stopped and silence filled the air. You looked over your shoulder as you stirred the contents and smiled when seeing Ash's expression.

The rose sat in one hand, and the mug rested within the other. Ash was smiling at your little note. A soft blush sat on his cheeks, and he looked so truly happy that it made your heart do a couple flips in the best way. You sighed softly and jumped when you felt liquid hit your fingers and realized the substance had foamed over the top. Luckily, you were able to tame the mess before it got too bad.

"What's this for?" His soft voice broke the silence, and you turned back to him once you'd wiped the mess away.

"It's for you, silly." You chuckled, and gently stirred the liquid with the stained wooden spoon. Seems Ash had been busy with this project for a little bit.

You felt him shuffle in beside you, with his hands cradled around the mug and flower like they were the most precious items in the world. You honestly felt really touched by his tenderness with them.

“Well... I get that but... why?” he asked, looking up at you with confusion written over his face. Once you’d finished stirring the pigment, you turned fully to face him. His gloves felt soft against your hands as you gently cupped his own, a tender touch with a matching smile.

“Remember that holiday you mentioned in your texts? It’s Valentine’s Day.” You explained as you brushed your thumbs over the tops of his gloved hands.

His sockets blinked. “Oh... I don’t think I know that one. We don’t really... celebrate most human holidays.” He looked down at your joined hands, and a small smile grew on his face. “What does Valentine’s Day mean to you..?”

You carefully removed the mug and flower from his hands and placed them on the counter, letting the rose sit inside the planter mug before you properly held his hands. He gave a gentle squeeze. Part of you thought he’d be more firm if he had the energy for it, but you’re not going to complain. Love isn’t only shown in physical strength, after all.

“Well, the short and modern version is that it’s a day for couples to just... be cute and lovey dovey. Celebrate being together, appreciating their partners. Give gifts, all that jazz.” You explained, probably very poorly, but judging by his face he seemed to understand. “Personally, I just like to spend time with my partner and do something fun.”

“Oh... well... We’re a couple.” he stepped a little closer. You could feel the tips of his shoes as they touched yours. “I’m your partner.”

“That you are.” You agreed with a hum, smiling when seeing his blush bloom on his cheeks.

“I...” he looked over to the counter where that large vase of flowers still rested. “I didn’t know today was that kinda holiday but... I guess I still have something to give you.” He pulled his hands away and beckoned you to the bouquet.

The clear vase held a bushel of very bright, healthy, and colorful flowers. Pinks, purples, and greens are neatly fluffed in an almost perfect circle; and you can’t help but imagine Ash tediously hunched over making sure it looked that way. You could only put a name to two of the flowers, but it looked gorgeous nonetheless.

“It’s very pretty.” You praised, gently reaching out to stroke a soft petal. “Did you grow these yourself?”

He nods. “Mmm... most of them. I had to get the limonium from a shop in town, but I grew everything else.” He smiled, looking very pleased with himself in regard to his flowers.

You bit your lip and stared hard at the bouquet, squinting as if the names of the plants would just jump out into your head. “.....which ones are those again?”

Ash chuckled, his smile widening as he took in my distress. “They’re the smaller purple ones. They’re also called sea lavenders, because of how much it looks like real lavender.” He explained, and gently rotated a flower to sit better with the bunch.

“Why not get real lavender?”

“Real lavender is toxic to cats.”

“Fair enough.” You nodded and smiled back at the bouquet. “It’s very pretty, hun. Thank you. And you didn’t even know it was Valentine’s Day?”

He blushed and shook his head, rubbing his arm shyly before he gently pressed his shoulder against you. “I’m.. glad you like it. I hope you like what it says, too.” He hummed.

You blinked. “Oh, shoot, is there a note?” You gently spun the vase, looking for a possible tag or ribbon.

“Oh, no. There’s no note. Um... right you probably don’t know a lot of flower language, huh?” He rubbed the back of his neck and turned his head away.

“I know red usually means love or something.” You faced him and smiled, heart fluttering at the apparent hidden message within the bouquet. A message he spent months growing and perfecting to give to you. “What does it mean?”

He fixed the strap of his overalls back to his shoulder, clearly a little shy. “Most of the flowers there mean.... First love, and similar to it.” He said softly, his face a deep blue.

You blinked and smiled slowly. “Ash..... that’s so beautiful! You went through all the effort to make all this just to tell me I’m your first love?” You could feel your own cheeks warming.

He nodded slowly and faced me, his smile the biggest it'd been so far. “I... didn’t know how else to say it.”

You used his hands to pull him close and kiss the top of his skull. “For someone who didn’t know about Valentine’s Day, you certainly chose the perfect day to give me this.”

He chuckled gently, squeezed your hands and sighed. “I love you, Petal.”

“I love you too, Ash. Thank you.”