

Mags Grabber

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## Flower Language

The notes started in October. Emmeline was in my calculus class and we were friends, sort of. The kind of friends that eat lunch together but don't hang out outside of school, you know? I liked her fine, we just weren't very close yet.

She started handing me these little drawings in class- these detailed little sketches of flower bouquets. They weren't little doodle-y flowers, each kind was distinct. The first note had a few different kinds of flowers in it. After looking at it for a moment, I leaned over and whispered to Emmeline.

“Are these daffodils?”

“Yes! And those there are gerbera daisies. Do you like it?”

I nodded. When I got home I taped it to the wall by my bed.

The next note was a few days later. I couldn't recognize any of the flowers in it, but I smiled anyway. I thought they were really sweet. I never saw her drawing so I wondered when she made them. Later at lunch she scooted closer to me and handed me an earbud. I made a face.

“I don't think we have the same tastes, man.”

“Ugh, Gia, just trust me, okay? I swear you'll like it.”

I took the earbud and put it in, and she started the song. It definitely wasn't what I normally liked, but it wasn't bad. It was soft and featured a lot of acoustic guitar. It did feel like a

good song for the kind of day it was- we were eating outside in the courtyard, trying to claim the last few days before it dropped below 60 degrees, and it was unusually warm. I was even wearing a t-shirt. Emmeline was in a sundress, I assumed trying to get one more wear out of it before packing it away for the winter. The leaves were turning and the sunlight made everything a little bit orangey. It looked gold on her hair as it moved in the wind.

I started getting notes once every week or two- I didn't always know the flowers once recognized peonies. For a pencil sketch she made them look so soft and alive. At lunch while we shared earbuds I asked, "When do you get the time to do these? I never see you drawing."

"Well, mostly at home. I have a big book of flowers and meanings and stuff and I like to draw what's in there." She blushed a little saying that.

"Oh? What do the ones you're giving me mean?"

"Nothing much. Friendship, cheerfulness. That sort of thing. Is it weird?"

"No, it's nice."

She gave me a big smile. "Hey, can I braid your hair?"

"Do you really want to?" It was still growing out from a pixie cut, just a little past my ears.

"I'll just do a little piece, it'll be cute."

It was colder now so we were in the loud and crowded cafeteria, so I had to cover one ear to listen to her music while worked. Every once in a while her fingers would brush my cheek as her hands moved quickly. She nodded along to the beat, her curly hair bouncing with her. I nudged her with my elbow and she looked at me.

"Can I get this playlist?"

She lit up. “You absolutely can!”

When I got home I put the playlist on and tried drawing to it. I don’t draw so I just used computer paper and a sharpie. I ended up doodling Emmeline- her freckles and curly hair, smiling big. The sharpie bled a little on the paper and her hair was just curly squiggles. It looked like a little kid’s drawing. I huffed, crumpled up the paper, and tossed it across the room. How did she draw so small and still make it look pretty? My sister, Nina, poked her head in the door.

“This sounds different for you.”

“My friend got me into it.”

She smirked. “Oh, your friend? Hey, nice braid.”

I chased her out of my room and slammed the door.

The next day Emmeline gave me another little drawing. She explained later, “They’re sweet pea. They mean thanks for letting me do your hair.”

“That’s a specific meaning.”

“Ha ha, so funny. They just mean thanks, the rest is me.”

“You can do it again, if you want. I liked the braid.”

She nodded. “I’d love to!”

In late November I offered her one of my earbuds instead. She looked at me.

“I thought your stuff was kind of hardcore?”

“This is some of the chiller stuff. I trusted you, it’s your turn. I think you’ll like it.”

She put the earbud in and I started the playlist- I’d spent a while making it, picking all of the songs that made me think of her.

She turned to me after a few songs. “Alright, I don’t hate it.”

“Do you want the playlist? I had a feeling you’d be into it.”

“Wait, did you make a playlist for me?”

“... No.”

In December, right before winter break, she poked me on the shoulder in calculus and passed me a piece of paper. It was bigger than any of the others- it was a wreath of flowers, with a little bow at the bottom of it. It was even colored, the different red flowers popping out from the green leaves. It was so delicate and real looking, it must have taken forever. I ran my finger along it in a circle. I looked back to Emmeline but she was focused on her work again.

At lunch I sat down next to her and pulled out the drawing.

“Is is beautiful. What are these?”

She gave a shy smile. “These are asters and these are amaryllis.”

“And those are red roses, right?”

She looked away. “Ah. Yes they are.”

She looked embarrassed- did she think I didn’t like it?

“It’s wonderful, Emmeline. I really love it.”

She looked at me. “I’m glad. Happy holidays, Gia.”

“Shit... I didn’t think to get you anything.”

“I didn’t want anything. Don’t worry, I’m just happy you like it.”

Obviously I still felt bad- over break I decided to make her a drawing in return. I didn’t know anything about meanings so I just picked what I thought was pretty. I spent a whole day on it- I even borrowed my sister’s watercolors to color it. I put on Emmeline’s playlist while I worked. When I was done it was clumsy, not nearly as pretty as Emmeline’s, but still pretty good. I

couldn't wait to give it to her. When I gave the watercolors back to Nina, she asked, "So what did you use them for?"

"Just a drawing."

"Aw, you're blushing!"

"I am absolutely not." I hurried out of the room.

When school started again, I waited until lunchtime to give Emmeline my drawing. When I gave it to her she gave me that wonderful smile before looking closer at the drawing, puzzled.

"What flowers are these, Gia?"

I blushed, embarrassed. They weren't really really recognizable as I drew them.

"Well those are striped carnations, and those are hyacinths. Over there are chrysanthemums."

"Ah. Alright."

I looked up at her. I couldn't read her face as she looked at the drawing. Then she stood up very fast and walked away, leaving her lunch untouched on the table.

"Emmeline?"

She didn't answer.

Calculus was only one semester so I didn't see her as much after that. She didn't sit with me in lunch anymore. I wanted to talk to her but I had no idea what I'd say. I was so hurt, I . . . Didn't she get why I'd made a drawing for her? How hers had made me feel? Each time I got one it felt like the whole room got twenty degrees warmer. I thought she knew that, but maybe she wasn't as okay with it as I thought. Maybe I'd read too much into her gifts. We didn't talk at all for almost a month.

At night I sat in bed and I looked at the drawings on my wall. I had quite a few over the months, with her wreath in the middle of it all. I'd trace the lines of the petals and try not to think about her until I fell asleep.

My family was a little concerned. After about three weeks of not talking to Emmeline, Nina came into my room and sat on my bed. I had a new sketchbook and I was scribbling out an especially stupid drawing of curly hair. I closed it when she tried to look.

"Gia, I'm kind of worried. I'll be honest, mom and dad told me to come talk to you, but I'm still worried."

"Well, tell them to leave me alone. And you, too. Piss off."

She huffed. "I get that you want to be all emo, but I do actually like you. I don't like seeing you all mopey."

"I'm not mopey, okay?"

"Is this about your friend?" She looked at the drawings. "She did those, right?"

I didn't look at her.

"Wow. I don't know what you did to fuck it up, but she must like you a lot."

"What?"

She pointed at the peonies. "Well, that's bashfulness." She pointed at another one. "That means loyal love." She shuffled closer to the wreath. "Amaryllis means beauty. And red roses? Come on."

"How do you know this stuff!?"

She shrugged. "I think it's cute. It's all online, dude."

"It is?"

The moment she left (looking smug), I pulled out my computer and looked up flower meanings. I pulled down all the drawings and tried to figure out what each flower meant.

Lasting love.

Beauty beyond compare.

Patience.

Thoughtfulness.

Secret love.

So I'd been right! I hadn't assumed wrong! If anything I'd underestimated her feelings. But that didn't explain why she'd been so upset at my drawing. I tried to think back to what I'd drawn. I looked up the meanings of chrysanthemum, striped carnations, and hyacinths.

Refusal.

Sorrow.

Slighted love.

I let out a groan. "Are you fucking kidding me?" Of course she was mad at me. I was an idiot. Obviously I couldn't let her go on thinking I actually meant that shit. I grabbed my sketchbook and immediately started a new drawing.

The next day at school, I found Emmeline in the lunchroom. She was sitting with a few other people- the girl next to her gave me a dirty look when I approached.

"Emmeline, can I talk to you?"

She didn't look at me. "I don't know."

"It's important. I have something I really need to give you. Can you- can we go outside really quick?"

“... It’s freezing outside.”

“Just, really fast.”

She stood up. “Fine. Quickly.” She grabbed her jacket and pulled it on as she followed me. Once we were in the cafeteria courtyard I led her to a bench. She sat and stared at me as I pulled out my drawing.

“Gia, if you’re gonna mess with me again, I don’t-”

“Just look at it, okay?” I pushed it into her hands. She opened it, looking at me warily.

After a moment looking at it her eyes went wide.

“You know these flowers, don’t you, Gia?”

“Yeah, and you know what they mean, right?”

“Dandelion... that’s overcoming hardship. Calla lilies are new beginnings. Um...”

“That one’s ambrosia. I’m not as good at drawing these as you are, sorry.”

“Ambrosia. That means-”

“ I like you back. I really like you. I mean the whole thing means that, but-”

“But the other drawing-”

“I didn’t look that one up! I just thought they were pretty!”

She covered her face. “Oh. I’m so dumb.”

“No, I’m dumb, all those drawings wer so sweet and I just-”

I was cut off by Emmeline hugging me tightly.

“You are dumb, Gia. I thought you knew!”

“I totally didn’t. I really sorry.”

She pulled back. “But you like me?”

“I really, really do.”

She laughed, her breath puffing out in clouds in the cold air. “I like you too!”

“I sort of figured!” I took her hand. “Can we go back in, though?”

“In a minute- oh, I’m so glad I can talk to you again because I found this great song that made me think of you.”

“Let me hear it, then.”

She held an earbud and I took it. As the song started, she put her head on my shoulder. I watched our breath slowly float into the sky, and I smiled.