

LOVE IN BLOOM

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She kneeled down in the garden, the warm brown skin on her knees stained with the damp earth. Her hands were slender and strong, fingers working delicately, precisely pulling the roots of weeds from her plot. The components of her arms glittered like sunlight catching through a crystal vase. Someone placed such a vase filled with daisies on my windowsill each morning, probably because they are my namesake. I heard her giggle in surprise as a frog leaped across her lap, startled out of his slumber beneath the daisies. Her laughs were wind chimes, ringing from the percussion of her joy.

She smoothed the soil frequently, seeming to revel in the satisfaction of clearing space: powerful in her control over life and death. Allowing light to fall onto the delicate leaves of her patients, she laboured slowly as the day was long. Carefully shaking clumps of earth from the roots, she smiled as she worked.

I watched her work lovingly, longed to feel the delicate mechanisms of her fingers against mine. The coolness of her fingertips, the warmth of her arms, metallic tendons warmed by the sun. I wished myself one of her plants, or perhaps the Earth itself, so that I might be so intimately cared for. Perhaps even be caressed softly in passing like her peonies; my face was the same shade as their petals now, anyway.

Damn this chair! I am too stationary to do what I want, too mobile for the peace of allowing my roots to spread beneath the soil, searching for nourishment. I spend much of my days photosynthesizing by my window, sometimes blessed by the vision of her labour of love.

Sometimes, I will pour my energy into capturing the moment with my pencil; I have pages of her profile, sketches of her beautiful prosthetic hands, her strong legs, her smile. Those moments mark the end of my independence for the day, my energy drained so deeply that my skin aches and I require assistance settling into bed, where I will eat my meals, and watch the sunlight slant across my walls.

It is always worth it.

Oh! How desperately did I want to be outside with her. To be the cause of her laughter, to feel my cheeks warmed by her light. I know I shouldn't be so foolish. I would just distract her from her job. She would feel obligated to tend to my needs instead of her garden. I can't do that.

But I want to. My hands grasped at my wheels, turning them forwards, then back, forwards, back. What if she was unhappy to have her solitude disrupted? What if she rolls her eyes as I roll into her space?

But...What if she smiles at me? What if she craves company? My heart flutters as a swallowtail flits past my window.

I must decide.

I swivel towards my door, then back to the window, running my tongue along my teeth until the tension in my jaw causes me to taste copper.

Damn it all. My mother and everyone else always told me to err on the side of caution, to avoid risks because I might get hurt. Where has this gotten me? Trapped in this room, in this chair, in this loneliness. What good is there in prolonging a short life if one does not even try to live it?

I grabbed my floppy sun hat from the hook next to the bed, steadied myself with a firm grasp on my wheels, then pushed myself down the short hall to the gardens and stopped in the doorway. Taking a deep breath to slow my racing heart, I exhaled as I wheeled myself into the sunlight.

The pathway crunched softly under my wheels and she turned towards me. Our eyes met, the corners of her smile lifted as my stomach rose in my chest, and my heart leaped into my throat.

“Daisy!” she said, “Even you couldn’t resist coming out on a day as beautiful as this! Did you need help with anything?”

I felt heat rise to my cheeks. “No... no, no, I don’t need anything. I just... uh... I just....”

“Shall we go for a stroll? I could give you a tour of the garden.”

“Please!”

She stood and brushed the dirt off her bare knees and waited for me to join her, before setting off at a slow pace around the gardens. We wove our way through the many curves and corners of the gardens, stopping every couple of steps. Perhaps she thought it important to give as detailed a tour as possible. Perhaps she wanted to spend more time with me... I dismissed the thought. She probably knew my arms needed to rest frequently. If she did, she did not make it obvious, something for which I was grateful. Her eyes met mine often, checking in that I understood what she had said, that I was still with her as we passed beneath the boughs of peach, apple, and pear trees, laden with fruit not yet mature, but full of potential.

“These are day lilies, just about to bloom... Here are the hollyhocks, in pink, red, and white - I love having as many varieties as possible... Lots of squash along the ground, and those are scarlet runner beans growing up the sunflowers... and here are the pepper plants, we have red, orange, and green sweet peppers, and lots of spicy ones — do you like spicy peppers?”

“Yeah, I do, though I haven’t eaten any in a while. My mother usually makes me bland foods because she doesn’t want to upset my ‘delicate body,’” I replied, looking at the long fruits forming under the shiny green leaves, their tips beginning to turn red as they ripened.

“Well, you must come down the hall to my room sometime, and try my curry! I grow all of the ingredients here myself, except a few spices which just don’t suit our climate,” she said. I nodded, smiling as I glanced into her soft golden-brown eyes before looking away just as quickly.

“How long have you lived here?” I asked, my heart racing at the invitation for dinner.

“Four or five summers, now, I think. I feel so at home here, it’s so lovely to be in a space where all sorts of people are welcomed, regardless of ability. After I lost my arms, no one in my old town treated me the same. They didn’t take me seriously anymore, as though I had lost my brain as well as my hands! So, I decided to see what the city could offer me, to look for a fresh start. And I am so happy that I did,” she smiled at me.

“I am too,” I said softly. The breeze rustled our hair and the leaves shivered in anticipation.

As we reached the daisy patch she said, “Of course you’re already familiar with these, I’ve seen you looking at the ones in your windowsill often. They’re your favourite, right?”

I scuffed my slippered foot against the footrest. “Actually, no. My favourite flowers are sunflowers, but because of my name...”

“Oh!” She jumped in, “Well I guess I must start filling your vase with sunflowers, then! Their season isn’t quite as long, but there are more than one variety here. I’m sure you know that already, though. You spend so much time watching out of your window.”

I could feel my cheeks turn poppy red, and I stopped mid-roll. “Wait... those are from you? You put the vase there? I’m so sorry for staring while you work... I... I didn’t want to disturb you... I’m sorry, I should go... I... I shouldn’t keep you from your work...”

“Don’t be sorry,” she shook her hair out of her face, “I’ve only wished you would come out to join me! It is so comforting to feel the dirt between your toes and fingers. Would you like to help me with the weeding?”

“I... I don’t think I can,” I limply gestured to my chair, sighing.

“That’s no problem! I can help you out!” She leaned close to me. I could feel her warm breath on my face. “Is that alright?” She waited until I nodded before wrapping one arm beneath my knees, the other behind my shoulders, easily lifting me out of the seat and placing me mindfully on the earth, next to where she had stopped weeding. Her arms were smooth and warm, with no sharp

edges where flesh meets metal. Up close, they were even more beautiful in their construction, intricate designs of vines and flowers embossed into the spaces between the robotic muscles and tendons, which flexed as she elevated and lowered my body. She smiled as she kneeled down next to me, I returned her gaze shyly. A bumble bee buzzed past my face, and I breathed a sigh of gratitude as birds sang in the trees above us.