

did we but pay the love we owe

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did we but pay the love we owe

by [widevibratobitch](#)

Summary

Spring brings life, spring brings love, spring brings fresh chances for new beginnings - and it is only up to us not to waste them.

Oh, and above all else - spring also brings dandelions.

Notes

This is a gift to @solraneth, who has made me notice every single dandelion I pass on my way when I am forced to leave my house because of Adult Business. This may sound nice and cute, but don't let that fool you, those little fuckers are literally everywhere and it is truly infuriating.

So sorry, bestie, no Sad Old Bitch aka Everyone's Favourite Spanish Monarch With Crippling Mental Issues(tm) in this fic. But there is gay yearning so I hope you'll like it anyway.

The title comes from James Russell Lowell's poem "To the Dandelion", because I am a pretentious bitch like that and because it is actually a really beautiful poem.

Carlos and Rodrigo here are like, I don't even know, 14? 15? something around that age, when people tend to start Questioning and Realizing some things, I guess. Either way, it is pre-canon, so fits both the play and the opera universe.

Enjoy! Let me know what you think!

Free afternoons at the university of Alcala are quite rare and much treasured occurrences to its students, and today, praise the Lord, is luckily one of such occasions. Carlos truly does not think he could concentrate on his studies, or to be entirely fair, on anything aside from trying his very best not to faint from the blinding heat and have Rodrigo try even harder to realize in time and catch him before he can hit the ground.

There is a place, half an hour away from the university grounds, far enough to be considered peaceful, and safe from the noise and the crowds of fellow students, close enough to be the first go-to place for the two of them on an afternoon like this one. The shade offered by the tree the Spanish Infant is currently resting under, leaning on its thick, rough trunk with his doublet open and shirt unbecomingly dishevelled, is a blissful respite from the offending weather. The other boy, the young marquis, rarely seen separate from his royal friend (and vice versa, perhaps even more so), lies next to him, stretched out on his back on the soft grass, with his head pillowed on the prince's lap and a small tome of poetry in his hand. Something in French, Carlos had noticed earlier, and did not even bother to ask. He hates French with a passion, though Rodrigo insists that it is a beautiful and extremely useful, to a man of his rank, language.

Their time passes on offhand jests and lazy conversations which at last morph into a sort of tranquil, companionable silence that Carlos treasures so much. The weather eases a little with time, the sun still shining brightly down at them, but not as relentlessly hot as just a few hours ago.

Sitting under the broad tree, one hand buried in his friend's hair, absentmindedly twisting the dark curls around his fingers like ebony rings, occasionally accompanied by a quiet, contented hum from their owner, listening to the mixing melodies of various birds, hiding from the boys' sight in the nearby, blooming grove, Carlos finds his head finally cleared from the mushy fog induced by the heat, slowly subsiding to a more acceptable level.

He looks around, at the deep emerald of the grassy terrain surrounding them, and that is when he notices the bright yellow patches, like hundreds of tiny suns strewn across a sky of green. He had not paid attention to them when they arrived here, too busy sprinting towards the only shadowed area they had encountered in the last half an hour. He sees them now, and though these wild, little things cannot possibly compare to the rich, robust flowers of the royal gardens back in Madrid or Aranjuez, there is some charm and beauty in their simplicity, he must admit.

Suddenly, a thought crosses his mind, and he disentangles his fingers from the soft, silky locks spilling across his thigh, plucks one of the flowers growing around them in patches of vibrant colour, and wielding it proudly in his hand, returns his attention to the other boy's head in his lap.

"What are you doing?" Rodrigo asks, looking up from his book.

"Nothing," Carlos arranges the flower carefully in his friend's hair. Rodrigo frowns at him in confusion, but does not stir, allowing the prince to do to him what he will. Carlos's fingers work intently, careful not to damage the stubborn little flower that just won't hold, until he

weaves it in properly and, finally, it stays in place. He leans back to admire the view. And it is a pretty one, for sure. The bright yellow of the flower stands out boldly against the dark mop of the other boy's hair. He suppresses the urge to roam his hands through it, so as not to disturb the delicate thing, woven neatly between the soft, ebony waves. He lets his eyes feast on this beautiful sight instead.

Rodrigo's frown deepens slightly at the contented, enamoured smile plastered on Carlos's face, and his hand flies up to his hair in alarm. His fingers brush against the tiny, delicate petals, nearly disrupting the precarious construction, before the prince's own hand swats his away. "Careful, or you will ruin it," Carlos scolds him, fixing the flower cautiously.

"A flower?" Rodrigo asks, glancing up at him, looking rather unconvinced.

"Dandelion." Carlos clarifies absentmindedly, forcing the flower back in place. He gently smooths an unruly strand of hair away from Rodrigo's forehead, his fingers brushing against the smooth, lightly tanned skin of his face. Carlos beams down at him with pure adoration, his heart swelling in his chest. Rodrigo chuckles and rests his still open book down on his chest.

"What are we now, some blushing maidens? Peasant girls, putting flowers in our hair?"

"Well, I think you look positively lovely," Carlos says and cannot help but smile even wider. His cheeks are already starting to hurt, but he smiles on. How can he not, when Rodrigo is smiling too, when he laughs again and turns his head away, trying to hide the colour blooming there rapidly. With that pretty flower glinting like a very tiny sun in his fluffy hair, and his flushed, full cheeks, he does indeed look a little like a blushing maiden. And an overwhelmingly pretty one, at that. And Carlos is suddenly overcome with a sense of yearning so strong, it almost makes him feel sick. "If you were a maiden, I would marry you," he says.

Rodrigo stops laughing. With the smile still frozen on his face, he turns his head to look at the prince again. He stares at him for a moment, both of them silent, before huffing out a soft little laugh and shaking his head.

"Don't be silly."

"I am serious," Carlos says in a solemn voice. "I truly would. So that we could be together, forever. I would want that very much."

Rodrigo looks back at him, his deep, dark eyes, too old for their young age, soften slightly when he says, "You need not marry me for that."

Carlos does not break his gaze, when he shrugs slightly with one shoulder and says, even softer, "Still, I would." His friend is quiet at that. Then he smiles again, and again, something blooms inside Carlos, filling him with a pleasant kind of warmth, unrelated to the current weather and the scorching Spanish sun above their heads.

"Even so, a mere marquise would hardly make a sufficient wife for the future king of Spain," Rodrigo says, not without mirth. Carlos humms, considering the argument for a moment.

“If you already were to be a girl, then I do not see why not a princess to that as well,” he decides at last and his friend laughs heartily, and Carlos follows suit, because once again, how could he not. Rodrigo shakes his head, still laughing, then slowly calms down, glances at the prince for a brief second and bursts out in laughter yet again, struggling to stop, and this sight is so dear to Carlos’s heart, he truly wishes this moment could last forever. Just the two of them, resting in the soothing shade of a tree, on this peaceful, spring afternoon, and his friend, his dearest friend in the entire world, with a dandelion in his hair and his head in Carlos’s lap, laughing.

Rodrigo tries to stifle it again and hides his flushed face from the prince’s eyes, snuggling it into the crook where Carlos’s stomach meets his hip. Warmth again, building inside him, filling him whole - but a different kind of warmth entirely. And yet this, too, isn’t an unfamiliar feeling around his friend, and so Carlos welcomes it eagerly.

“Such silliness,” Rodrigo mutters, muffled, into the prince’s stomach.

“If you were a girl,” Carlos says before he can think twice of it, “I would very much like to kiss you.”

Rodrigo freezes for a second, then turns his head to drill his gaze into Carlos and something almost sad flashes in his eyes. “Well, I am not,” he says at last, expression unreadable, the solemnity of his voice a stark contrast to the merriment from moments ago.

Would you have to be one, though? Could this not be enough? It certainly does make me wish it were. Some part of Carlos brings this question up and refuses to let it die away, an inquiry he will later ruminate on for years to come. And will not find the answer until, in the end, it shall be too late for one anyway.

For now though, Carlos is still a child, barely into adolescence, and so he asks, with a strange feeling of hope that he cannot bring himself to feel too guilty about. “And, if you were?”

A moment passes in silence, Rodrigo examines him, his gaze scanning the prince's face above him intently, jumping from his eyes to his lips, and back to his eyes again. “If I were, then I think,” Rodrigo says at last, slowly, carefully, his gaze now fixed on one spot, never leaving the Infant's eyes. “I would like that too.”

Carlos feels something, low in his belly, twist uncomfortably, and a similar tightening answering in his chest. How unfair, how unjust it feels to him in that moment, that it would be right there for the taking, if only one little detail in the whole picture was different.

And does it really make such a big difference after all? If God minded it so much, why then would he put in him this strange yearning for the unobtainable, this desire for Rodrigo to be with him always, to never lay his head in the lap of another, boy or girl, to never let fingers, that weren't Carlos's own, roam through his hair or braid flowers into it?

And yet this feeling, it is not about possession, no, never that. It is far too pure for that. In fact, it feels so pure, so virtuous to love Rodrigo, that Carlos would never believe it was not God's very own hands, planting this seed inside him all those years ago.

And a kiss - what is one, little kiss between friends? Must it be reserved for the wife Carlos will one day undoubtedly obtain? For some foreign princess, who will never know him, and love him, half as much as Rodrigo does now (and always, he has promised)? No, it seems much more appropriate, more right to him, to give that kiss to a dear friend than a wife who is a stranger.

He leans down carefully, and opens his mouth to say all this, or perhaps not say anything at all, when Rodrigo suddenly tenses and sits up hastily, the book still resting on his chest slides down to his lap and Carlos barely manages to draw back in time to prevent their heads from colliding.

"It is late," Rodrigo says, something in his voice sounds strained, and Carlos thinks he looks a little paler. "We should not tarry much longer, they will start looking for us. For you, more specifically," Rodrigo closes his book properly and tucks it under his arm. He stands, brushes invisible dust from his breeches, solely for the sake of principle, rights his doublet next, straightening and smoothing it meticulously, and Carlos just stares at him, quiet. How fascinating, how alluring his dearest friend looks, even in such simple actions. At last, Rodrigo turns to him and meets the Infant's timid smile with one of his own, his face smoothed and tranquil once again, all traces of unease gone from his dark eyes. "Come, my Prince," he says and helps Carlos up.

Rodrigo does not let go of his hand as they make their way back to the university grounds. Carlos looks at the bright dandelion flower, still nestled comfortably, forgotten, in his friend's hair, and smiles. At least he has this. And he always will.

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