

Unrooted

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Summary

So there are flowers in the Eclipse base, and Subz keeps finding more when he thinks he's cleaned them all up. Okay, whatever. Not a problem. Chat can mock him for his delicate, floral lifestyle all they like: he's just as confused as they are. Besides, they shut up when he starts playing really shitty AI Plankton covers, so all's well that ends well. Mostly.

MCYT aro week day one - trope subversion

Notes

Hello everyone and welcome to the shitshow! I think there are only two days I did not write for, so this is going to be a fun week :D

Prompts for this day were unconventional relationships / trope subversion

Look, Subz isn't stupid, alright? He can tell when people are hiding things, and he can *especially* tell when Vitalasy is hiding something, because they've been teamed for two seasons—three, if he counts this one. Which he does. But that's besides the point.

Subz isn't *stupid*, which is why he notices when flower petals start showing up around the base. At first, he thinks it's just a bit, like *oh, haha! My name is Vitalasy, and this place is too emo for me! I'm going to start leaving bits of purple flowers everywhere, because I think you need to be less serious, and flowers are pretty. Like you!*

Buuuuullshit! He calls bullshit. It's cap. Lies. He's not emo, and he's not too serious, and *fine*, maybe the flowers are a little pretty. *A little*. They're delicate, a shade of purple that almost matches Vitalasy's cloak, rounded on the outside edge and slightly curled on the inside.

The petals very quickly got out of control, moving from a little thing here or there that Subz had to fight to sweep up to something much, much more. He finds them tangled in their clothes when doing laundry, kicked under stairs and shoved away in chests, and it's at that point that he becomes convinced someone is fucking with him.

There's no other reason for the flowers to be showing up! Vitalasy, for all of his *canon* furry tendencies, none of which Subz displays, does not go frolicking in flower fields that much. Not enough for . . . all of this.

So the foxboy isn't behind it, for once. That leaves their allies—Zam and Planet, who are the only two that know where the latest Eclipse base is—and their enemies. And Subz *severely* doubts that Mapicc is breaking into their place just to scatter flowers around like he's a cute little flower girl at a wedding. He wouldn't put it past Ro, maybe, but these days, Ro's been busy with other things.

So there are flowers in the Eclipse base, and Subz keeps finding more when he thinks he's cleaned them all up. Okay, whatever. Not a problem. Chat can mock him for his delicate, floral lifestyle all they like: he's just as confused as they are. Besides, they shut up when he starts playing really shitty AI Plankton covers, so all's well that ends well. Mostly.

When he starts finding full flowers, he knows that something isn't right. Either Vitalasy is playing a really long, elaborate prank on him, or there's a more sinister, ominous reason for them. Either way, when he pulls out the latest, full flower he found, this time tangled up in his bedsheets, and shows it to Vitalasy, his ears twitch.

“Where did you find that?” he asks, and Subz just *knows*, instinctively, that his voice isn't right. “Did you get it? For me?”

Pushing Vitalasy isn't the right way to get answers, though. He clams up under pressure, sometimes folds his ears back and bares sharp teeth, and Subz doesn't want them to fight. That's why it's easy to lie, and say, “Yeah. What, you don't like it? It's purple, like your clothes.”

Red blooms across Vitalasy's face, and not for the first time, Subz is so fucking happy that he's trusted enough to see Vitalasy without this hood on, emphasizing his more animal features. No, I—I love it. Thank you, Subz."

He makes a low sound of acknowledgement, and then pops up on his tiptoes to tuck it beside Vitalasy's ear, wiggling it around until it should stay up on its own. It's a classic case of *no stem?* and he hates that he finds the joke funny. Still. "Of course."

Somehow Vitalasy manages to turn even redder, and it gives Subz exactly no proof. Net zero amounts of information. He's never going to be hired for his detective skills at this rate.

So he waits, and he watches. The flowers keep showing up, some hidden, while others are left out in the open, like whoever's been scattering them around has given up. They range from a light lilac to a darker, deeper purple, and there's some part of Subz's hindbrain that wants him to collect them, for no other reason than he *can*. It is a part of his hindbrain that he ignores, knocking his forehead against Vitalasy's the next time he sees him to dull the urge.

So the flowers keep coming, some small, and some large, and in all different shades of purple. One day, when Subz gets bored of working with villagers, he looks the up, and after a fuck of a lot of failed searches, gets a name. *Gladiolus*. He's not sure what the fuck an iridaceae is, but the flower looks wicked, like a rounded sword. Or something else that he will not name.

It still doesn't explain why they've been showing up in the base, though. At least, not until he walks into Vitalasy's room one day, rambling on about their latest plan for server domination and Leviathan vanquishing when he finds Vitalasy hunched over, one hand on his dresser as he coughs. The sound is horrible, a sick, rattling noise that shakes Vitalasy around like a chew toy, and Subz can't help but run over, reaching out to support him.

Vitalasy flinches away from his hands, presses himself further against the chests until he's almost falling over, and still he's coughing, bringing a hand up to cover his mouth. Between his fingers is a flash of something purple, a rich, deep colour that Subz has seen before. It's a purple that matches his under-armour, speckled in places with a deeper, webbing black.

He knows, instinctively, that Vitalasy *has* been the one bringing the flowers into the base. Even as he stops coughing, folds his hand into a fist and tries to look at Subz like nothing is wrong, Subz *knows*. Vitalasy is not well. He hasn't been well for a long time.

"Vi," he says, and then stops, because there's no guideline on what to say when your teammate has been coughing up flowers. "How long?"

"Hey, Subz!" Vitalasy says, trying for cheerful and failing severely, the scratchiness of his voice giving him away instantly. He leans against the chests using the fist with the flower tucked in it, trying to play things off like Subz is an idiot. "How long what?"

Subz isn't stupid, and he sure isn't letting Vitalasy get away with this one. "How long have you been coughing up flowers?"

Vitalasy's ears pin back. "What do you mean?"

“I’m not stupid, Vitalasy. How long have you been coughing them up? I know they’re purple, and I know they’re gladioluses, but I want to know how long they’ve been coming out of you.”

“Gladioli,” Vitalasy says under his breath, refusing to look at Subz. “They’re gladioli.”

“I don’t give a shit if they’re the president of the goddamn United States, how long have you had hanahaki? How long has this been happening, Vi?”

His shoulders slump, and Subz watches as every single one of Vitalasy’s defences slip away, hands going slack. It gives Subz an opportunity to grab the fist he has braced on the chest, and pry it open, picking out a cluster of bloody, connected flowers. It’s worse than he’s ever seen it, petals curling in on themselves with the sheer weight of body juice that is supposed to stay *inside* the body. It’s not good.

Quiet enough that Subz has to strain to hear it, Vitalasy whispers, “A couple of months.”

“What?”

“A couple of months,” he says louder, gritting his teeth and finally, *finally* looking Subz in the eyes. It feels nowhere enough like the win Subz thought it would be. “Six, maybe seven.”

Seven months. Seven goddamn months Vitalasy has hidden this from him, hidden something that could end up with his death. “We’re supposed to be teammates, Vi. *Teammates.* This is—it’s fucking lethal! It’s lethal. It could kill you.”

“You think I don’t know?” Vitalasy asks, and now his voice is *loud*, ears pointed in the *pissed* direction. Fuck, he’s screwing this up. He just wants Vitalasy to be okay. “I know, Subz. I’ve known the whole time. I guess I had hope that it would get better.”

“Well it’s clearly not! Who the fuck is it, Vi? Who do I have to hold at axepoint, huh? I can’t lose you.”

Vitalasy looks away, jaw flexing. Great. Another shit move on Subz’s part. He’s just fucking everything up, huh? He can’t comfort Vitalasy right, can’t make him feel safe or happy or comfortable enough to tell Subz who exactly is making flowers fucking suffocate him to death.

He reaches out, slow enough that Vitalasy could knock his hand away if he really wanted to. He’s not good with the whole emotion bullshit, can’t comfort Vitalasy in all of the right ways, but he’s willing to try. It’s all he can do to hope Vitalasy will let him.

It takes a moment, but Vitalasy’s ears droop, and then six feet and four inches of foxboy is dropping himself over Subz in one of the cringiest hugs he has ever been a part of. Vitalasy is like a cooked ass noodle, wobbling all over the place as he buries his face in Subz’s neck, snuffling weakly. He’s not crying yet, thank god, because Subz doesn’t even know where to start with that, but he is weak, barely able to keep himself standing. Awkwardly, Subz pats his back, trying to soothe him.

After far too long of being blanketed by Vitalasy and his cloak—the *home* cloak, the one filled with holes and way too many colours of patches that Subz stitched on with wobbly stitches—he finally gets an answer. It’s not a loud one, and Subz has to strain to hear it, but against his neck, Vitalasy murmurs, “It’s you.”

It’s fucking *who now?*

Nah, nah, nah. He heard that one wrong. Vitalasy isn’t in love with *him*, right? That’s, like, impossible. Statistically fucked up. Against the bro code. Him and Vitalasy are a team, forever and ever amen, but not . . . *that*. He’s not no hanahaki ass bitch. He doesn’t do that shit! He doesn’t need hanahaki to be Vitalasy’s, and *especially* doesn’t want to play dating simulator with him when what they already have works so well.

“*Weh ?*” he asks, a weird noise that comes from somewhere in his chest and rumbles around in him the same way his totally macho, not furry-like *at all* purrs do. “I’m sorry, say that again. I thought you said—”

“Yeah.” Vitalasy cuts him off, chest shaking with a bitten down cough. “It’s you.”

Subz doesn’t think, he just speaks. “Well that’s fucked up.”

It does not make Vitalasy laugh the way he expected. If anything, it makes him *worse*, body trembling violently against Subz like a cat left out in the rain. Like a wet cat. A poor little meow meow. He should not be thinking that right now. Vitalasy is in love with him. And it will kill him. *fuck*.

“I just . . . I thought I could get you to love me. Enough to make it go away,” Vitalasy says, barely a cracked whisper. “I don’t want to die like this, Subz.”

“I don’t want you to die like this either,” he says, a far too honest admission. “I don’t.”

“Then just love me back,” Vitalasy begs, a low, drawn-out keen. “Subz, *please*.”

As much as he hates to say it, Subz can’t lie. Not when it’s Vitalasy. “I can’t. I don’t want you like that, Vi.”

Instead of breaking down or crying like Subz would expect, Vitalasy pulls away, pushes at Subz’s chest with his forearms until they’re no longer touching. He looks fucking wrecked, eyes red and ears haywire. “Then I’ll *die*, Subz. I’ll die! I have no choice. I need you to want me back. I need you to love me.”

Like Subz has a choice in the matter either? Like he can *choose* to want Vitalasy back the way someone in a shitty romance manga does? Bullshit! “The fuck do you mean you have no choice?” he asks, and he can’t keep the frustration out of his voice, can’t stop it from getting loud. “You have *all* the choice. You are not a helpless little fucking puppet, Vitalasy. Accept the fact that I will not love you back in the ways that you want!”

His voice cuts through the room like a cleaver, the angry edges bouncing around the rock and the stone until all he can hear is his own breathing, the echoes of emotion. In front of him,

Vitalasy looks shattered, broken into bits. It's not what he wanted. It's never what he wanted. He just wants Vitalasy to be *okay*, but he's dropped the ball at every turn.

This is shit. This is absolute, utter *dogshit*. "Shit," he says, and hates how it sounds like he's trying not to cry. "I—I'm sorry, Vi. I didn't mean it like that."

Vitalasy snuffles, and he isn't looking at Subz, like the sight of him is enough to hurt. That in itself is like a sword through the chest, the sword he had to shove through Vitalasy's heart last season. "You did mean it like that, though."

Subz can't lie to him. "I did."

"And you're right."

Subz is what now?

"You're right," Vitalasy says, oblivious to the fucking mess of feelings going through Subz's body right now. On a scale of bad days, this one is going to get put right next to all of the worst parts of season three. "I can't make you want me."

"You can't." Saying it out loud feels like flowers are being ripped from Subz's own lungs, but it's the truth. He's not made like that.

Vitalasy nods, swallows like he's trying to convince himself of something. Unconsciously, Subz reaches for his water flask, and passes it over without a sound. He half expects Vitalasy to turn it down, to tell him to go fuck himself, but their fingers brush, and Vitalasy is uncapping the worn leather, taking a big sip.

Relief burns through Subz, because Vitalasy hating him is maybe the one thing he could never bear to live with. He drinks for a bit before wiping off his mouth with the back of his hand, and passes the flask back to Subz.

"But you can let me love you?" he finally asks, voice still watery. It's not a question Subz would say no to, not in a thousand years.

"I can."

Vitalasy nods, eyes fluttering closed for a second. When he opens them, his eyes are red around the edges, but a lot more confident than they were before. "Then I'm okay with that."

"Good," Subz says, and it feels like he can breathe again. He's not going to lose Vitalasy, the one person he could never bear to lose. Vitalasy is everything to him, is the teammate Subz would give his life for, the person he would want to spend all of his days with. "I don't want to hurt you, Vitalasy."

A hint of a smile graces Vitalasy's face, and it looks like he can breathe too, right up until the moment his chest spasms, and he starts choking. Subz is by his side in a flash, one hand on his shoulders while the other goes to his lower back. Vitalasy's own hands are white-knuckling the chest as he heaves, making some of the worst noises Subz has ever heard in his

life, and *fuck*, this is the end, isn't it? He's gone and ruined it all, killed Vitalasy by refusing to love him back.

All he can do is rub at Vitalasy's shoulders, trying to support him through each cough that sounds like death in person, wheezing and rattly. If he gives Vitalasy anything in life, at the very least, it should be comfort. Support. The understanding that he shouldn't have to hide anything from Subz, because none of it matters, in the end. The only thing that matters to him is Vi, and maybe also the grind.

It doesn't stop the heaving, drool spilling from between Vitalasy's lips like a dog with rabies. His mouth is open, tears streaming down his face with the force of each cough, and *fuck*, Subz hates this. He hates that there's nothing he can do to help, no way he can stop Vitalasy from dying. All he can do is try his best to offer support, regardless of if it means he's in the line of vomit.

"It'll be okay," he says in his best *it will be okay* voice, which is admittedly kind of shit, and barely loud enough to be heard over the death rattle coming from Vitalasy's chest. "Just keep breathing."

Vitalasy sucks in a weak gasp of air, and shoots Subz a look that says *do you not think I am trying?* Which. Okay, that's fair. It's not Subz's best advice, but there's not much else he can do, not when Vitalasy makes a horrible gagging sound, something finally coming out of his mouth.

Like a fucked-up birthing video, Subz watches as red-stained *green* fights its way out through Vitalasy's mouth as he gags and chokes and gags some more, each cough rattling through him like a rock thrown in a hollow cave. If he knew it would help, Subz would grab hold of the stem, blood and spit be damned, and yank it out of Vitalasy, but he's heard the horror stories, and doesn't want to hurt Vitalasy any more than he already has.

All he can do is wait, and pace, and wait some more, refusing to leave Vitalasy's side, pulling the hair falling into his face into a little ponytail. The green spilling from his mouth turns to brown, turns to mottled masses of ties wound and woven together, and still Vitalasy won't stop coughing, body trying to get rid of the sickness within. Subz fucking hates it.

After minutes that feel like long, long hours, the plant comes free. It bounces off of the chest top, tumbles to the floor, and then all Subz is staring at is his red, tear-streaked face, the way Vitalasy heaves and gasps and drools without a care in the world.

Then, he breathes, and it sounds strong. Vitalasy *breathes*, and it no longer sounds like he's dying.

Subz jumps into action almost instantly. He unclips his own cape from his throat, grabs Vitalasy's face in his hand and starts wiping off all of the drool and streaked on blood as Vitalasy snuffles, gasping for air like each breath could be his last. When it's all gone, he hands his water flask over, lets Vitalasy grab it in shaking hands and drink out of it while he wipes the chests free of blood. If there's no evidence of this happening, then it is as good as fake news. They can pretend that Vitalasy didn't almost die, that blood isn't staining his cloak.

Once it's all gone, he bundles the fabric up, and throws it off to the side, turning his attention back to Vitalasy. He's got some water in his system, as evidenced by the flask now sitting uncapped on a chest, and he's looking at Subz with this strange ass expression. It is probably made worse by the fact that he looks like he's been run through a washing machine. Soggy fox. Soggy, soggy Vitalasy.

"You good?" he asks, when Vitalasy keeps staring at him, not saying anything. "Hello? Earth to Vitalasy, someone home?"

He blinks, and then blinks again, looking from Subz's face to the ground. Subz follows his stare, and sees the shit Vitalasy was coughing up, a mess of roots and stems smeared with blood. It looks like a fucking *nasty* stab wound, something absolutely horrific to choke up. Vitalasy is stronger than a lot of people give him credit for.

"It unrooted," Vitalasy finally says, mystified. "I—it's gone. Subz, what?"

"Power of love is bullshit," he offers in response, because there's nothing else he can say. Idly, he kicks at the pile of roots on the floor, tangled up together like a webbed spawner. "Power of Subz wins all."

"Absolutely the hell it does not," Vitalasy says, but there's a smile on his face as he knocks his shoulder against Subz's. He follows it up by knocking their foreheads together in a way that has Subz smiling the same stupid grin, because this is *his* Vitalasy, romance be damned. "Love you, Subz."

"Yeah, yeah," he says, trying to feign indifference, and almost certainly failing. "Love you too."

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