

The Language of Flowers

Allow me to tell you a story. A story from the age of myth when the world was being formed and gods still roamed the lands. Look around you. What do you see? The trees all around us, the quiet stream alongside, the clouds in the sky above, and the colours of flowers here and there. Ahhh, the flowers.

Picture then, if you will, the world around us if we were in the time of myth. We might see the stream, you might see the forest piled up on the banks as it is now. You might also see a meadow strewn with yellow flowers. There is a figure in the field. She is very beautiful, but not in a hurts-the-eyes kind of way. She has the kind of beauty that glows from within and welcomes rather than towers over you. This is Ushara, the Goddess of Love.

Ushara reclined in the warm sunshine enjoying the soft breeze as it gently combed the grasses and flowers around her. Dreamily she watched the clouds overhead form and reform. She smiled as a cloud took on the fleeting shape of something familiar, or in one case something quite amusing. Rolling over she absently ran her hands through the soft grass beside her. Her fingers encountered a small yellow flower. Chin on hands, she gazed at the flower. A slight frown crinkled her brow.

A small cat slid out from amongst the stems of grass beside the sprawled goddess.

"Oh hello." said Ushara. "Where did you pop up from?"

"You know me." purred the cat, butting its head against her leg and rubbing its throat across her hand as she stretched out to pat it "I just enjoy being around you."

"I have thought of something." Ushara glowed happily.

"There's a first for everything." the cat half closed its eyes.

"Cheeky!"

"So what's this great thought of yours?"

"My what? Oh yes. I was thinking that it would be great to have something that symbolises one's love for another."

"And do what with it?"

"I don't know. People could give it to each other maybe?"

"Don't they do that already?" the cat blinked languidly at her.

"What do you ? Oh " Ushara rolled her eyes in mock exasperation. "I'm trying to have a serious discussion here. No I mean an actual object or something."

"Sorry." said the cat.

"You are the spirit of aspirational goals. If anyone can come up with an idea, it would be you."

"I guess so." said the cat looking away across the meadow. "So shall we have a brainstorming session then?"

"Brainstorming? I have no idea what this is."

"It's something I made up just now." The cat stood up, growing taller and straighter, a casual turtle neck shirt and smart trousers forming around him. He turned towards a nearby flip-chart on an easel and pulled out a pad of post-it notes and pack of coloured marker pens. "The rules are, we just make up ideas fast and snappy. No idea is too stupid. We don't judge them. We just get them out and in-front of everybody - well in front of the two of us anyway." He swivelled to Ushara and pointed a red marker pen at her. "First we need to define the problem."

"Its not so much a problem, but I just think it would be nice....."

"To?"

"To what?"

"I need you to succinctly describe what it is you want."

"Well I guess I'd like something that one person can give to another to show that they love them." Ushara sighed. "You know, so they can take one look at this thing and know that deep down the other person cares for them. And it should be something real."

"Let's hold off on that last point." The cat had been busily scribbling notes on the flip-chart. "We don't want to restrict our thinking just yet."

"Well I want something that's distinctive. You know and obvious what it means."

"OK?"

"It's no good having someone present this thing to another and them saying 'Er thanks.... what's this for?'"

"Anything else?"

"Well it needs to be something simple and spontaneous."

"Simple and spontaneous." The cat added "Simple" and "Spontaneous" to the flip-chart. "OK. Thank you. This is a good start. So let's get down to conceptualisation. How about this for starters; a log of wood."

"No."

"What about a rock?"

"No"

"A toadstool."

"No"

"A carefully crafted sculpture of a nose?"

"No"

"We're brainstorming here remember." said the cat looking at the flip chart filled with a complete absence of new ideas on it. "No idea is too dumb."

"Well a carefully crafted sculpture of a nose is not all that spontaneous. And what if the nose ends up looking like the persons ex-lover's nose?"

"Fair point. I suppose sculptures of other parts of ones anatomy are probably a bit too obvious?"

"Right." Ushara raised an eyebrow. "A little less obvious would be good. Something you can display to others would be better."

"How about a flower? They're common which makes being spontaneous easy."

"I suppose." Ushara looked doubtfully about and bit her lip thoughtfully. "They're not particularly special are they? They're all yellow and they all look much the same from a distance."

And indeed they were, for, in this time all flowers were yellow. If we look around with our imagination in the time of myth we see many flowers of all types, but all of them are yellow. The tiny daisies scattered across the meadow, the poppies, to the roses scrambling over the rock outcrop jutting out of the meadow a short way off, all are butter yellow.

The cat wrote "flower" on his flip-chart and circled it. As an after-thought he added some petals and a stem with a leaf. He nodded to himself and swivelled back to Ushara who was dreamily pulling petals off a small yellow flower. "This is good. So let's explore this idea a little bit. What do we associate with flowers?"

Ushara pondered the partially dismembered flower. "Yellow smell"

The cat added the satellite words "Yellow" and "Fragrance" to his flip-chart and joined them to "Flower" with a blue line. "Anything else."

"Abundant Shape" suggested Ushara and then proudly "Sex!"

"I guess you're right. I hadn't thought of that." the cat added the words to his flip-chart.

The cat sat down beside Ushara and gazed thoughtfully at the chart. "Something distinctive. They all have distinctive smells but that's not really that obvious at a distance. What about colour? Something other than yellow."

Ushara pursed her lips. "Well that would certainly be distinctive and obvious. Red. I like red."

"Great!" said the cat. "We can trial the idea. I can colour one in with my red pen. What sort of flower?"

"I don't know." shrugged Ushara. "It can't be too common. Maybe something with a nice smell."

The cat stood up and cast about. The field was full of daisies and wildflowers. He wandered towards the rock pile jutting from the field, examining a flower here, smelling another there. When he caught sight of the rose spreading itself around the rock he knew he had found the ideal candidate. Carefully he extracted a single yellow rose.

"What do you think?" he handed the rose to Ushara.

Ushara inhaled the fragrance and closed her eyes. "It's got a nice smell. Looks vaguely rude, and requires a little effort and risk to get. Yes. I think this will work."

"May I?" the cat retrieved the rose and began carefully colouring in the petals with his red pen.

"It looks wonderful!" Ushara admired the red rose. "This is perfect."

"We're early in the development of this idea though. What say we trial it for a while to get the idea socialised and then re-visit it in a little bit?"

"I don't know. I really like this one."

"Well just think on it for a day or two." the cat pulled a black rectangular object out of his pocket, and faced it towards the flip-chart. It made a strange click noise. "Just for the record."

"What's that?" asked Ushara.

"This is what I call a smart phone." he handed it to her. "It does all sorts of things. I can use it to record pictures. You'll like this; it has a thing on it for helping people meet their future lover. I've decided to call it

"Tinduh". You know, a bit like sparking a fire."

"Can I have a look at this Tinduh?"

The cat handed over the black rectangle after swiping his finger across it in a complicated pattern. "Swipe right if you like the look of a person and their biography, or swipe left if you don't. Just touch on the picture of the person you want to find out more about."

Ushara tentatively held the object and touched the surface. She gasped as the pictures suddenly changed and the one she had touched reappeared with some text. A giggle escaped from Ushara as she read through the text in rapt fascination. "How do I look at another one?"

The cat leaned over and demonstrated. "It's easy, watch."

"Are you here?"

"No." the cat looked awkward for a moment, but Ushara didn't notice as she was scrolling through lists of prospective lovers. "I can see I'm not going to get my smart-phone back for a while."

He resumed his cat shape, and curled up beside the thoroughly engrossed Goddess of Love as she plotted and planned matches, and a few dalliances herself. Profiles with whispers of people's desires and tastes sleeted past and swirled around Ushara as she absorbed Tinduh. A plan began to evolve in the back of her mind. A truly aspirational plan with stretch targets and goals that everyone could buy into.

Ushara shook herself and glanced down at the small form nestled against her leg. The cat dreamed, twitching occasionally as if facilitating product focus group workshops. "Did you put this idea in my mind?" she whispered. The cat flicked an ear.

While the cat slept Ushara gently and softly stood up, careful not to disturb him. Her eyes were drawn to the flip-chart and the packet of marker pens lying on the ground. Selecting a new marker pen, she got to work.

The cat finally awoke, stretched luxuriously and yawned widely. The goddess was still fixed to the smart phone, a beautiful smile on her face as she single-handedly threw the Tinduh algorithms into new and much more effective patterns¹. Suddenly what his eyes had been seeing registered in his brain. Colour. Everywhere he looked there were coloured flowers. Not just the red roses he had coloured, but every flower had a different colour, many were multicoloured, stripes, spots, graduated. He spotted his marker pens scattered on the ground a short way off.

"Goddess?" the cat pawed at Ushara.

"Wha..?" Ushara unglued herself from the smartphone.

"Goddess. We have a problem."

"We do?"

"Look at the flowers."

"Aren't they beautiful?" bubbled Ushara, picking a nearby daisy and critically examining its smart white petals and glowing yellow center. "They all could mean something different now. A whole language of flowers."

"But what about the red rose? It will not be as distinctive."

"No. This is special." Ushara held it up. "This means true love."

And that is how the world became filled with so many colours of flowers, and the red rose became the symbol of true love.

1 Thereby defeating the whole purpose of Tinduh which was not to pair people off.