



“...the truth is I will always love you. I have you burned into my heart and tattooed on my body.”

Dear Valentine,

Late winter has never been my favorite time of year. I'm suffering from post-holiday-let-down and, whether I'm single or coupled, Valentine's Day has never been one of my favorite holidays. Don't get me wrong, I like an excuse to book dinner at a fancy restaurant and an buy massage oil and expensive chocolate, but the sugar-coated commerciality gets to me almost as much as either the pressure to make your partner love you more or the loneliness of not having one to disappoint.

That said, like the occasional weeks of amazing sun Portland can sometimes get in February, the month of red and pink can sometimes surprise you with intense moments of love and joy. I'll be spending the very beginning of the month traveling islands off the coast of South America with one of my best friends in the world, certainly a love as important as anyone I ever bought sex toys with. And while this has plenty of potential for its own post-vacation sadness, who knows what the rest of the month has in store.

Sure, it is bound to have its rainy, gloomy days. It will have days where I am freezing after riding my bike in the pouring rain or having been splashed at the bus stop by careless drivers. It will have moments where I want to tear my hair out, yell at my loved (and less loved) ones, hide in the darkness of my room.

But it will also see the very beginnings of bright flowers poking their heads out of the ground in this wildly fertile land we live on. Sexual energy and the will to urge spring forth will be in the air. It will have the intense love and care of my family, a few sweet nothings from friends or lovers, the support of my close-knit but diverse LGBTQ community, and even random acts of kindness by strangers. It will continue to be the constant reminder that I consistently seem to need that I am very blessed to live in this place with these people.

So this is my love letter to you, Portland. We've had our good times: a long honeymoon period, birthing and co-parenting babies of art, writing and music. We've had our rough patches: fought, cheated on each other, almost broken up so many times, been to couples counseling. But the truth is I will always love you. I have you burned into my heart and tattooed on my body. So Portland, will you be mine?

Love, Alley

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