Rosmella or Simella?



A tale about a girl, a flower, and a flavor the world forgot.

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Poetry leak

In a world of pink and sweet, Where everything is tidy and neat, They eat what's pink and sugary, Dye their hair with pinkish glory. They look so cute, they act so nice, You may think it's paradise. But in the shadow, she sat there, In a school that had no spare. She looked at the pink sky with a glare, Even refused to dye her hair. She got sick from eating sweets — She'd rather choose the food she eats. Pink is sweet and full of light, but it looks awful on sad nights. She didn't twirl or paste on grace — Real emotions lived on her face. Whispers grew, and hate was spread, Gossip followed where she fled. But under a tree, in summer's air, a dying flower - no one cared. Not pink, not glazed, not shining bright, Just pale and dark — she held it tight. She gave it sun, she gave it rain, and felt less lonely in her pain. The flower bloomed in honest hues, And so did she — but no one knew. She searched for the secret of this flower, a quiet treatment, healing power. Long before the sweetness and blinded pink

Lay beauty in what's rare and unique. For kindness isn't bows or

shows, Or fitting in

with practiced prose. It's loving what the world won't see — The

quiet root of

empathy.



PART 1

IN A WORLD SATURATED WITH PINK, WHERE PINK IS LIFE ITSELF, A METAPHOR FOR LOVE, AND A SYMBOL OF PEACE, ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING IS BATHED IN PINK. A PLACE WHERE THE ROSE SUN RISES OVER A PINK LAKE, ITS SHINING WAVES BECKONING ON.



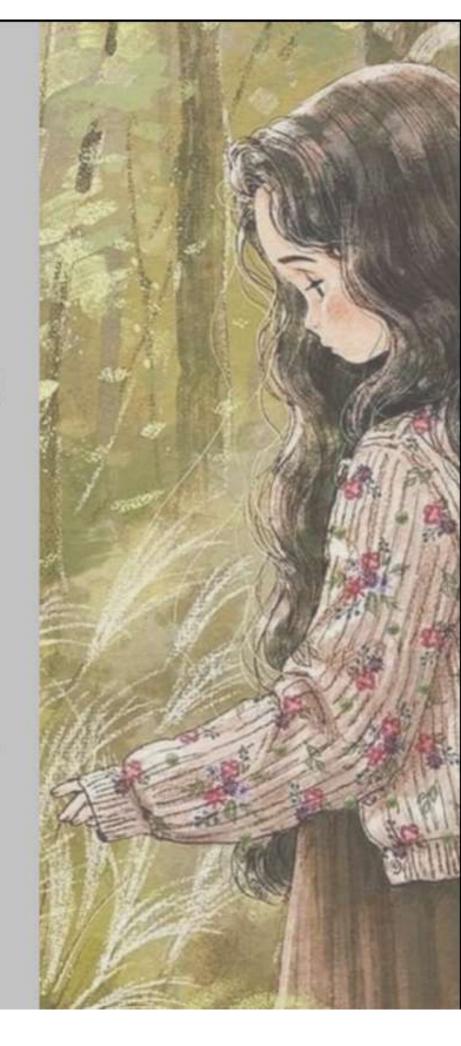
IN THIS MAGICAL NATION, THERE IS ONE DISH THAT WHISPERS THEIR CULTURE: A SMOOTH PINK SAUCE CALLED ROSMELLA, AN ALCHEMY OF ROSES, PEONIES, HYDRANGEAS, AND CARNATIONS. ITS SMELL IS NOTHING BUT WORSHIP; ITS TASTE IS FLOWERED AND SUGARY, SO ENTICING THAT PEOPLE FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE WORLD WOULD WANT TO BE ABLE TO TASTE ITS LOVELINESS.

THEIR RESIDENTS ARE AS VIBRANT AS THEIR SURROUNDINGS, RENOWNED FOR THEIR **COTTON-CANDY PINK** LOCKS, RADIANT PINK EYES, AND RUBY-RED LIPS. THEY ARE GENTLE AND WARM-SOULED, AND ALL OF THEM ARE **GULINARY EXPERTS AT** CONFECTIONS. THEIR **HEART LANGUAGE IS** THE SWEET KITCHEN, AND ROSMELLA IS THEIR TREASURE.





BUT IN THE MIDST OF THIS SUGARY FANTASY, THERE IS A GIRL WHO IS UNLIKE THE OTHERS. SHE IS NAMED LIORA. SHE HAS CHESTNUT-BROWN HAIR AND DEEP BROWN EYES. SHE IS THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE THESE FEATURES. SHE CAN'T STIR A POT IN A WORLD OF FLAVOR. SHE DOESN'T ENJOY SWEETS, AND SHE'S NEVER EVEN TASTED ROSMELLA. OTHERS COOK WITH PASSION, AND SHE SETS SUGAR ABLAZE. WHILE THE OTHERS GLADLY SPORT PINK, SHE WOULD PREFER EARTH TONES AND SIMPLICITY.



PART 2:

THE SUMMER VACATION HAD FINALLY ENDED, AND THEY ALL RETURNED FROM THEIR ROSY CORNERS

OF THE GLOBE TO REUNITE ONCE MORE AT UNIFORMIA ACADEMY, THE ONLY

ACADEMY IN THE

NATION, NAMED AFTER THE BELIEF THAT EVERYBODY SHOULD BE THE SAME, WITH NO PLACE FOR

THE DISSIMILAR.

LIORA WASN'T EXACTLY EAGER TO GO BACK TO THAT ENDLESS PINK CYCLE, NOT JUST BECAUSE OF

THE BULLYING AND INTERMINABLE SILENCE THAT DOGGED HER FOOTSTEPS EVERYWHERE; SHE HAD

LEARNED TO EXPECT THAT BY NOW—BUT BECAUSE EVEN HER OWN FAMILY DIDN'T
ALLOW HER IN

CLOSE, UNLIKE HER PERFECT PINK-HAIRED SISTER, LIORA WAS SIMPLY "THE MISFIT,"

A NAME THEY

USED AS A TAG TO REMIND HER SHE DIDN'T BELONG.

WORSE THAN THE TEASING WAS THE EXHAUSTION OF HAVING TO ENDURE SUCH FROZEN

INTOLERANCE ON A DAILY BASIS. EVEN WHEN SHE FINALLY GOT UP THE COURAGE TO SPEAK TO

HER FAVORITE TEACHER, MISS METIS, ALL THE WOMAN COULD SAY WAS, "TRY TO ENHANCE THE

ANTONYM." LIORA FROZE. IT FELT LIKE A POLITE WAY OF SAYING, CHANGE Yourself, as if the

PROBLEM WAS LIORA'S DIFFERENCE NOT THEIR REJECTION OF IT.

PART 3:

EVERY YEAR, ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, UNIFORMIA HELD A HOLY RITUAL KNOWN AS THE BLOOMING RITE, A RITUAL IN WHICH EVERY STUDENT CHOSE A FLOWER TO CARE FOR UNTIL THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL. IT WAS NOT GARDENING. THE FLOWER SYMBOLIZED THE GROWTH, DILIGENCE, AND ATTUNEMENT OF A STUDENT TO THE SCHOOL'S VALUES: BEAUTY, DISCIPLINE, AND GRACE. A WILTED FLOWER WAS A SIGN OF NEGLECT. A HEALTHY ONE WAS A SIGN OF HONOR.

THE ENTIRE SCHOOL GATHERED IN THE GRAND ROSARIUM, A VAST GARDEN FILLED WITH SOFT LIGHT, IN WHICH THOUSANDS OF PEONY, HYDRANGEA, ROSE, AND CARNATION FLOWERS AWAITED THEIR GUARDIANS. PINK SHADES SPARKLED LIKE SILK IN THE BREEZE.

COUPLE BY COUPLE, THEY PROGRESSED WITH THEIR HEADS HELD HIGH, CHOOSING THE FLOWER THAT ATTRACTED THEM THE MOST. SOME KNELT DOWN, SPEAKING GENTLE PLEAS TO THEIR ROSES. OTHERS STROKED THE SMOOTH PETALS OF A HYDRANGEA AS IF NEGOTIATING IN SECRET. THERE WAS LAUGHTER AND CHATTER IN THE GARDEN.

LIORA WASN'T THERE YET. BY THE TIME SHE ARRIVED - ALONE, IN DOUBT - NEARLY ALL THE FLOWERS HAD BEEN TAKEN. THE ONLY ONE REMAINING WAS A SINGLE, PATHETIC BLOOM NEAR THE HEDGE OUTSIDE. A BARE, WIRY STALK, ITS PETALS LONG SHED. ONE DRY LEAF WAS STUCK ON IT AS IF IT HAD FORGOTTEN AUTUMN.STUDENTS HAD NOTICED.

"IS THAT EVEN ALIVE?"

"WELL, IT'S FITTING TO HER."

"THE GARDEN GAVE HER WHAT SHE DESERVES."

LIORA HEARD THEM. SHE ALWAYS DID. SHE SAID NOTHING.

MISS METIS, SCROLL IN FRONT OF HER, ARCHED AN EYEBROW AT HER CHOICE "AH. THE LAST PETAL," SHE SAID, HER VOICE POLITE BUT COLD. "IT HAS STRUGGLED."

NO ONE VOLUNTEERED TO HELP HER PLANT IT. NO ONE ASKED HER ITS NAME. WITH THE THORNY STEM HELD AGAINST HER CHEST, LIORA WALKED AWAY IN SILENCE. HER FINGERS BLED. BUT SHE DID NOT DROP IT.

LATER THAT EVENING, HER DORM WAS QUIET. A SLIGHT WIND CREPT THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW, CAUSING THE CURTAINS TO FLUTTER LIKE A PHANTOM.

LIORA SAT ON THE EARTH, A BROKEN TEAGUP BEFORE HER. IT WAS ALL SHE POSSESSED. SHE DUG A SMALL AMOUNT FROM THE GARDEN EDGING, HER OWN FINGERS STILL BLEEDING FROM THORNS AND SECRETS. SHE GENTLY INSERTED THE FRAGILE STEM INTO THE GROUND. IT TREMBLED A BIT,BARE, DEFEATED. BUT SHE KEPT HER HAND FIRM.NO SPELLS. NO WISHES. NO TEARS.JUST STILLNESS.

ALREADY HAD THEIR FLOWERS LOOKING HEALTHY. BUT LIORA'S WAS STILL A BROKEN THING IN A BROKEN CUP.

SHE LOOKED AGAIN AT IT, THEN WHISPERED:

"LET'S SHOW THEM." AND WITH THAT, SHE TURNED AND WENT AWAY, LEAVING THE FLOWER TO REMAIN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

PART 4:

EACH AFTERNOON AFTER SCHOOL, WHILE OTHERS LAUGHED IN GROUPS OR WALKED THE COURTYARDS WITH THEIR PERFECT PETALS, LIORA WENT ALONE TO HER DORM. THERE, ON THE WINDOWSILL, THE FRAIL STEM WAITED—STILL BARE, STILL SILENT.

IT HADN'T GROWN.ITS SINGLE LEAF HAD WILTED FURTHER. TO ANYONE ELSE, IT WAS HOPELESS BUT LIORA
REFUSED TO GIVE UP.

ONE EVENING, WHEN THE SKY OUTSIDE WAS WAN WITH STARS, SHE KNELT BESIDE IT. SHE EXTENDED HER HAND AND DELICATELY TOUCHED THE SHATTERED TEACUP, AS IF SCARED TO CAUSE IT TO BREAK FURTHER.

AND THEN SHE WHISPERED:

"YOU KNOW... I WASN'T CHOSEN EITHER." HER VOICE WAS SOFT, YET STEADY. "WHEN I FIRST GOT TO UNIFORMIA, I THOUGHT SOMEONE WOULD WATCH OUT FOR ME. A FRIEND. A TEACHER. SOMEBODY. BUT NO ONE DID. THEY LAUGHED WHEN I SPOKE. THEY TEASED ME ABOUT MY NAMES. LIKE I DIDN'T BELONG." SHE GAZED OUT THE WINDOW, REMEMBERING. "BUT I STAYED. I LEARNED. I KEPT SHOWING UP. EVEN WHEN IT HURT."

SHE FACED THE DROOPING STEM, HER VOICE MORE RESILIENT NOW. "YOU MAY NOT HAVE PETALS. YOU MAY NOT BE PINK OR PERFECT. BUT YOU HAVE ME. AND I WILL NOT LEAVE."

FROM THAT NIGHT FORWARD, LIORA WAS A GUARDIAN IN THE FINEST SENSE. SHE CHECKED THE SOIL EACH MORNING BEFORE BREAKFAST. AT LUNCHTIME, SHE TALKED TO THE PLANT IN A GENTLE VOICE. IN THE EVENINGS, SHE VISITED THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AND SEARCHED FOR OLD, DUSTY BOOKS ON PLANT CARE AND FLOWER HEALING.

SHE BORROWED A BOOK CALLED "GENTLE GARDENING FOR SENSITIVE GROWTH" AND ANOTHER CALLED "FLORAL ALCHEMY: THE ART OF SAVING THE FADING".

ONE SENTENCE MADE HER EYES SPARKLE: "EVEN THE WEAKEST STEM WILL BLOOM AGAIN, IF SOMEONE BELIEVES THAT IT STILL WILL." LIORA COPIED THE LINE AND TAPED IT TO HER WALL.

SHE MADE TINY SHADE HATS FROM SCRAP MATERIAL SO THE SUN WOULD NOT SCORCH THE SOIL. SHE PLACED A BEAD OF HONEYWATER AT THE ROOT, HOPING IT WOULD TAKE EFFECT. SHE EVEN HUMMED UNDER HER BREATH WHILE WATERING IT.

SHE CALLED IT "RAY". NOT BECAUSE IT LOOKED LIKE LIGHT BUT BECAUSE ONE DAY SHE WISHED IT WOULD.

AND YET, IT DID NOT FLOWER, HOWEVER, IT DID NOT DIE, EITHER AND FOR LIORA, THAT WAS ENOUGH
BECAUSE SOMETIMES THE BRAVEST KIND OF HOPE IS THE KIND WHICH WILL NOT LEAVE EVEN WHEN NO ONE
ELSE BELIEVES IT SHOULD STAY.

PART 5:

THE DAYS PASSED, SOFT AND LANGUID LIKE FALLING PETALS.LIORA KEPT HER PROMISE. WHILE HER PEERS GIGGLED OVER THEIR BUDDING ROSES OR WHISPERED SECRETS ABOUT PRUNING AND PETAL GLOSS, SHE STAYED DEVOUTLY LOYAL TO THE NAKED, STILL STEM IN HER DORM ROOM.

SHE PROVIDED IT LIGHT. WATER. GENTLE WORDS. AND HER TIME. GIRLS JEERED AS THEY PASSED BY.

"STILL TALKING TO THAT STICK?"

"MAYBE IT NEEDS A FUNERAL, NOT FERTILIZER."

"COME ON, LIORA. IT'S DEAD."

BUT LIORA DIDN'T FLINCH. SHE HAD LEARNED TO LIVE WHEN EVERYONE EXPECTED HER NOT TO. AND SHE TRUSTED IN HER FLOWER; NOT BECAUSE IT WAS THE EASY THING, BUT BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE WOULD.

EARLY IN THE MORNING, AFTER A NIGHT OF ENDLESS STUDY AND RESTLESS WINDS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD, LIORA WOKE WITH A START. THE TEACUP HAD BEEN DISPLACED BY THE WIND.

SHE RUSHED TO THE WINDOWSILL, POUNDING HEART. SOIL LAY STREWN ACROSS THE FLOOR LIKE DISCARDED SECRETS.

NO. NO. NO—SHE WHISPERED, DROPPING TO HER KNEES.

SHE CAREFULLY GATHERED UP THE DIRT WITH SHAKING HANDS. THE STEM WAS STILL WHOLE—BRUISED, DIRTY, BUT NOT SNAPPFD.

THEN SHE SAW IT. AT THE BASE, NEAR WHERE HER FINGERTIP USED TO BLEED, WAS SOMETHING NEW.A BUD. SMALL. WHITE, JUST BEGINNING.

IT WASN'T RED. IT WAS WHITE. ALMOST SILVER. LIKE A MOONLIGHT EGG. SHE GASPED IN, HER HANDS FROZEN IN MID-AIR
LIKE WINGS. IT WAS SO SMALL BUT SOMETHING WAS.

SHE DIDN'T SPEAK TO ANYONE THAT DAY. NOT EVEN WHEN HER TEACHER PRAISED HER ESSAY IN CLASS. NOT EVEN WHEN ANOTHER GIRL HANDED HER A FRIENDLY BUT AWKWARD NOTE READING: "YOU'RE WEIRD, BUT SMART. THAT'S COOL, I GUESS."

SHE JUST WENT BACK TO HER DORM, THREW THE WINDOW WIDE OPEN, AND BREATHED: "YOU'RE ALIVE." AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE BLOOMING RITE DAY, SHE SMILED.

PART 6:

IT BEGAN SOFTLY. A SECOND PETAL, THEN A THIRD. A FOURTH.

A WEEK AFTERWARD, THE ERSTWHILE BARE STEM WAS CROWNED WITH SOFT, GLOWING PETALS — SILVER LIKE STARDUST, FAINTLY RADIANT EVEN AT NIGHT. AND ALONG WITH IT CAME SOMETHING THAT NO OTHER FLOWER IN SCHOOL HAD: A SMELL, NOT CLOYING NOR CHEMICAL, BUT RICH, CLEAN, AND OLD. LIKE MOUNTAIN AIR. LIKE RAIN FORGOTTEN.

THE OTHER GIRLS NOTICED. SOME HUNG AROUND HER WINDOWSILL A BIT LONGER THAN WAS NEEDED. ONE EVEN ASKED, IN A WHISPER: "WHAT IS THAT FLOWER?"

LIORA DIDN'T KNOW AND SHE HAD TO. THAT NIGHT, WELL AFTER CURFEW, LIORA CREPT DOWN THE QUIET HALLS, A CANDLE HELD HIGH IN HER SHAKING HAND. THE SCHOOL LIBRARY STOOD BEFORE HER, LOCKED AND BATHED IN MOONLIGHT. BUT THE OLD SIDE DOOR, GNARLED WITH AGE, YIELDED TO A GENTLE PUSH.

SHE CAME IN AS A THIEF, NOT OF GOLD, BUT OF TRUTH. THE SHELVES LOOMED OVERHEAD, DUST COLLECTING ON EVERY SPINE. SHE SCANNED, FAST BUT CAREFUL, UNTIL SHE DISCOVERED IT: "FLORA MIRABILIS: A GUIDE TO EVERY KNOWN BLOOM."

SHE DREW THE HEAVY VOLUME ONTO THE WINDOW SEAT AND FLIPPED PAGE AFTER PAGE. ROSES. PEONIES.

HYDRANGEAS. CARNATIONS. TIME AND AGAIN. NOTHING. NOTHING SILVER. NOTHING GLOWING. NOTHING LIKE HER FLOWER.

UNTIL—HER BREATH CAUGHT. THERE IT WAS.

A YELLOWED SHEET, PAINTED BY HAND WITH A SILVER FLOWER SO LIFELIKE IT WAS AS IF IT BREATHED.

PANAKEIANTHOS: THE ALL-HEALING FLOWER

"FABLED TO BLOOM BUT ONCE IN A HUNDRED YEARS, AND ONLY WITH THE CARE OF A SOUL THAT HAS KNOWN SORROW IN SILENCE, YET STILL CHOSEN TO REMAIN KIND. BENOWNED FOR ITS RARE SILVER PETALS AND HEALING SCENT. LEGEND SPEAKS THAT A SINGLE PETAL CAN HEAL THAT WHICH NO MEDICINE CAN. ONCE BELIEVED TO BE EXTINCT."

LIORA BLINKED OVER THE PAGE, HER PULSE THUMPING. EXTINCT... BUT ALIVE IN HER HANDS. SHE LOOKED DOWN AT HER INK-STAINED FINGERS, STILL SMELLING OF DIRT AND POTENTIAL.

THE FLOWER THEY JEERED. THE FLOWER NONE HAD CHOSEN. THE LAST ONE.

AND IN THAT MOMENT, IN THE GENTLE HUSH OF MOONLIGHT AND SHEETS OF INK, LIORA BREATHED SOFTLY TO

"YOU WEREN'T A MISTAKE.
YOU WERE A MESSAGE."



IT WAS THE DAY OF THE GREAT
ROSMELLA CHALLENGE, A FLAGSHIP
YEARLY EVENT AT PACIS. DOZENS OF
VISITORS, PATRONS, AND ALUMNI
MINGLED IN THE GRAND COURTY ARD, ALL
CLAMORING FOR A TASTE OF THE MOST
FABLED CREATION IN THE SCHOOL'S
HISTORY: ROSMELLA SAUCE, A ROSEBASED DELICACY SAID TO EMBODY
ELEGANCE, TRADITION, AND THE PACIS
IDEAL OF "PERFECT SOFTNESS."



EVERY STUDENT HAD TO COMPETE. **EVEN LIORA. SHE** WASN'T FOND OF ROSMELLA-NOT ITS SYRUPY SCENT **NOR ITS PINK GLAZE. IT WAS TOO** MUCH LIKE **EVERYTHING SHE WAS NOT. BUT** PRESENCE WAS MANDATORY.



THIS YEAR'S PANEL OF JUDGES INCLUDED THREE MASTER COOKS, THE HEADMISTRESS, AND THE DUCHESS HERSELF. LIORA STOOD AT HER STATION, LOOKING DOWN AT HER INGREDIENTS: DRIED ROSES, SUGAR CRYSTALS, BLUSH SYRUP, POWDERED PETALS. SHE FELT SICK. HER SAUCE WOULD BE AWFUL. SHE KNEW IT. HER HANDS SHOOK AS SHE STIRRED. IT WAS FLAT AND BITTER.



THEN, HALF BY REFLEX, SHE DIPPED HER HAND INTO HER APRON POCKET AND PULLED OUT A SINGLE PETAL OF THE **PANAKEIANTHOS. SHE** PAUSED. "ONE. MAYBE IT **WON'T SAVE IT... BUT MAYBE IT'LL MAKE IT NOT** SO TERRIBLE." SHE DROPPED THE PETAL INTO THE POT. THE SILVER MELTED IMMEDIATELY, SWIRLING INTO THE BLEND LIKE MOONLIGHT INTO HONEY.





AN HOUR PASSED. THE GONG RANG AND THE COMPETITION WAS OVER. EACH STUDENT STEPPED AWAY FROM THEIR WORK. LIORA LOOKED AT HERS. IT DIDN'T SHINE PINK LIKE THE OTHERS. IT WAS PEARL-WHITE WITH SILVER STREAKS. AND THE FRAGRANCE... IT WASN'T ROSMELLA. IT WAS DEEPER, CALMER, OLDER THE JUDGES STROLLED ALONG THE LINE TASTING SAUCE AFTER SAUCE. STUDENTS WAITED NERVOUSLY, HANDS BEHIND BACKS, SMILES TENSE. WHEN THEY REACHED LIORA'S TABLE, THE HEADMISTRESS FROWNED: "THIS ONE... DOESN'T SMELL LIKE ROSMELLA."

ONE OF THE CHEFS BENT FORWARD SNIFFING. HE BLINKED. "IT'S NOT ROSMELLA AT ALL," HE BREATHED. "IT'S... SIMELLA?"

GASPS RIPPLED THROUGH THE CROWD. SIMELLA? A LEGENDARY, LONG-LOST SAUCE SAID TO BE MADE ONLY BY ANCIENT HEALERS. ITS RECIPE HAD BEEN LOST FOR CENTURIES. ITS FLAVOR WAS SAID TO CALM FEAR, EASE PAIN, AND EVEN REVEAL TRUTH. AND HERE IT WAS, IN FRONT OF THEM—FROM LIORA'S POT.

"IMPOSSIBLE," THE DUCHESS WHISPERED. "HOW DID A STUDENT REPLICATE SIMELLA? IT HASN'T BEEN SEEN IN MORE THAN 200 YEARS..."

THE HEADMISTRESS SLOWLY TURNED TO LIORA: "WHAT... DID YOU ADD TO THIS?" SHE DEMANDED, HER VOICE LOW AND KEEN.

LIORA'S MOUTH DRIED. SHE GLANGED DOWN AT HER HANDS, STILL SLIGHTLY COVERED IN SILVER, AND ALL SHE GOULD SAY WAS: "JUST... A PETAL."

PART 8:

LIORA STOOD IN THE CENTER OF THE SCHOOL HALL. HER DISH HAD QUIETED THE ROOM. SIMELLA. SUCH IS WHAT THEY WOULD NAME IT.

A SACRED DISH, MYTHICAL OUT OF TALES OF YORE — ONLY CRAFTED BY THE MOON GARDENERS, YEARS BELIEVED TO BE LEGENDS. NO ONE HAD EVER DARED SO MUCH, OR THOUGHT, AS TO ATTEMPT REPLICATING IT. AND YET, HERE IT STOOD. CRAFTED BY HER.

THE JUDGES LOOKED AT EACH OTHER, BEWILDERED. WHISPERS SPREAD AMONG THE SPECTATORS. "IMPOSSIBLE," SOME MURMURED. "SHE

MUST HAVE CHEATED," OTHERS MURMURED. "THIS GIRL DOES NOT BELONG ANYWAY."
HER TEACHER, MISS METIS, APPEARED, HOWEVER. HER EYES STERN, HER TONE CONTROLLED.

"TRY TO MAKE THE ANTONYM BETTER."

NO ONE UNDERSTOOD. EXCEPT LIORA. IT WASN'T ABOUT BLENDING IN. IT WASN'T ABOUT ERASING WHO SHE WAS. THAT LINE, WEIRD, CONFUSING, GORGEOUS, WASN'T EVER MEANT TO TEACH HER TO BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.

IT WAS MEANT TO SAY: BE THE OPPOSITE, BUT MAKE IT SHINE.

SHE WAS NOT BUBBLEGUM SMILES AND COTTON CANDY SWEETNESS.

SHE WAS MOONWHISPERS AND FROSTBITTEN LEAVES.

SHE WAS NOT THE FLOWERBED EVERYONE REMEMBERED.

SHE WAS THE DARK BLOOM THAT GREW IN THE SHADOWS.

AND THAT DIDN'T MAKE HER BAD. IT MADE HER BRAVE.

AS THE HALLWAY ERUPTED INTO APPLAUSE AND QUESTIONS, LIORA SMILED SOFTLY. NOT BECAUSE SHE'D WON. BUT BECAUSE, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, SHE HADN'T ATTEMPTED TO BE ANYBODY ELSE.

THAT NIGHT, SHE SAT UNDER THE STARS, HER FLOWER GLOWING BESIDE HER. SHE OPENED HER NOTEBOOK AND WROTE HER FINAL LETTER, NOT TO HERSELF, BUT TO EVERY CHILD WHO'D EVER FELT LIKE HER.

DEAR READER,

MAYBE YOU'RE JUST TOO DIFFERENT.

TOO LOUD, TOO QUIET, TOO BRIGHT, TOO DARK,

MAYBE THEY SAY TO YOU THAT YOU DON'T FIT IN — THAT YOU NEED TO BE ADJUSTED.

BUT LISTEN UP:

YOUR DIFFERENCE IS NOT A FLAW.

IT IS NOT SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.

IT IS NOT A FAULT.

YOUR DIFFERENCE IS YOUR MAGIC.

IT IS YOUR LIGHT IN THE SEA OF UNIFORMS.

DON'T PRUNE YOUR PETALS TO FIT INTO ANOTHER PERSON'S GARDEN.

GROW WILD. BLOOM BOLDLY.

AND REMEMBER: YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

WITH ALL MY LOVE AND SILVER,

LIORA

Now it's your turn, dear reader! Have you ever felt different? Unique? A little bit like Liora?

*Did you know?

UNESCO created a special day called the International Day of Respect for Our Differences. It's celebrated on May 21st every year and is also known as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. It's a day to celebrate what makes each of us unique and to learn from one another!

On and for this special day, and every day, your voice matters.

Activity: Write your own message to the world!

Use the space below to send a message to anyone who has ever felt left out, judged, or not enough because of their differences.

You can start with: "To anyone who's ever felt..."

"I want to say..."

You can even draw something that represents your uniqueness!

Remember:

Your difference is not a mistake.

It's a light.

Shine it proudly.

Your message: