

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 CULINARY 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.
LIDRA 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, LIDRA 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." LIDRA FROZE. IT FELT LIKE A POLITE WAY OF SAYING, CHANGE
YOURSELF, AS IF THE
PROBLEM WAS LIDRA'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 BLEED. 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 TEACUP 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 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 SNAPPED.

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.



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 COURTYARD, ALL CLAMORING FOR A TASTE OF THE MOST FABLED CREATION IN THE SCHOOL'S HISTORY: ROSMELLA SAUCE, A ROSE-BASED DELICACY SAID TO EMBODY ELEGANCE, TRADITION, AND THE PACIS IDEAL OF "PERFECT SOFTNESS."



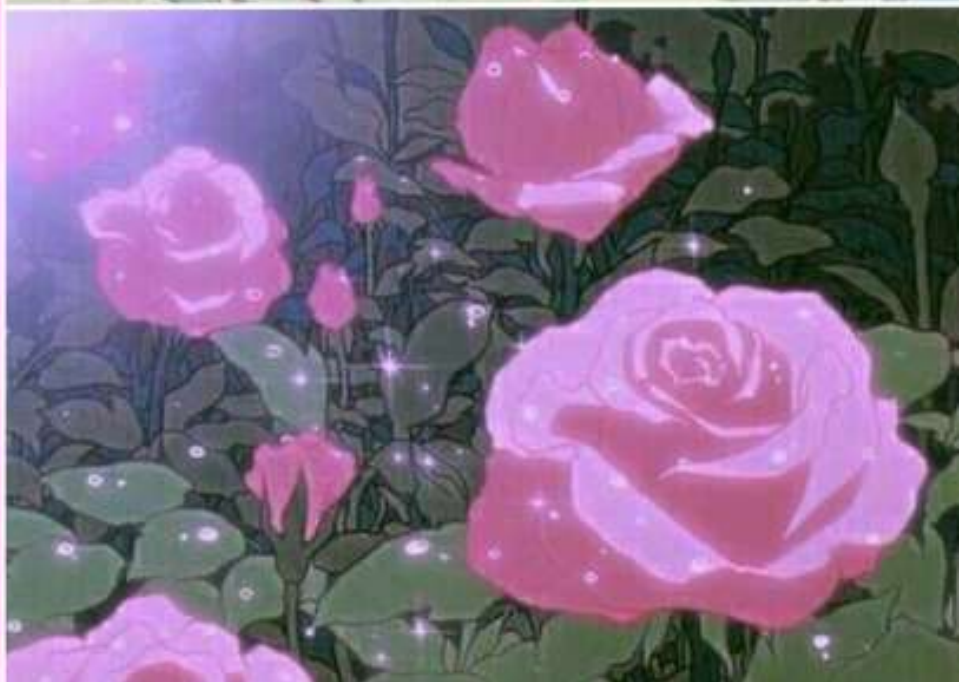
EVERY STUDENT
HAD TO COMPETE.
EVEN LIORA. SHE
WASN'T FOND OF
ROSMELLA—NOT
ITS SYRUPY SCENT
NOR ITS PINK
GLAZE. IT WAS TOO
MUCH LIKE
EVERYTHING SHE
WAS NOT. BUT
PRESENCE WAS
MANDATORY.



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 GLANCED DOWN AT HER HANDS, STILL SLIGHTLY COVERED IN SILVER, AND ALL SHE COULD SAY WAS: "JUST... A PETAL."

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:

