

The Title of "Special"

On a windowsill rests a purple lily, lounging in its pot beneath the only sun it has ever known. It's rather marvellous how little such a flower can be content with, as if the same, still life day in day out is something less than desirable, for it is among the *only* things it knows to even exist.

A gentle gust from the ceiling fan sways one of its leaves, brushing up against the wooden window frame like a finger.

The flower just sits there, as if to let the fan have its way with itself.

If it had a voice, it could perhaps speak in displeasure, but as fate would have it, the lily would not be bestowed any such luxury.

Day by day, the street outside shifts from morn to eve, crowd to stillness, and should the Prince of Fortune have his way, a passerby may, perhaps, come here to catch a glimpse of a flower unlike many others.

The Lily is, simply put, a strobe of light in a smoky void, people of all avenues of life strolling on by and slipping a few seconds out of their day to pay it some attention, no matter how fleeting.

What a lovely life it must be, no?

To rest as a beacon of vibrance that will never fall victim to its own mind?

All around this room are other flowers: a row of blue and pink hydrangea, a hanging jar of orchids, an old vase of violets, and even one without a life to call its own: a mural of a chrysanthemum.

The sunlight that breathes life into these flowers further gleams across this room, though regions beyond the entrance door lay in darkness: a space without such a plant to shatter its veil.

On a day like every other, the Purple Lily receives another visitor: a lone street sweeper who ambles up to the window and stares at it.

"What a spectacle of a sight!" they think to themselves, basking in the presence of untainted life: but a single reminder of what once sprawled across this dense, concrete flood.

Daily life for this individual is simple: they patrol to clean the streets of the litter that emerges now and then, and yet this Lily is one they could never see themselves sweeping. A glance is more than enough to set it apart from rubbish, though would this plant have any concept of that? Any concept of the decay that may, someday, erode its little paradise in the future?

They tap the window, but there comes no response from the flower or anybody else in the house.

What a shame... What a shame that our species cannot communicate with something so full of life. What a shame that such a glimmer of peace cannot share with humans its secrets to happiness and contentment.

Dejected, the street sweeper departs, returning to their phone as they pace away.

The Lily just sits there, as if to let the street sweeper draw their own conclusions on the nature of its existence.

Another breeze from the fan flaps up a petal, almost like how one would wave an arm. Perhaps a mouth is unnecessary for this flower, for it knows no emotion other than an unseen, perpetual smile.

As a car treks down the road outside, another figure approaches, crossing the street with a folder in hand.

He puts on his glasses and adjusts his badge as he nears the window, pausing just like many, many others before him.

How intriguing... Life too lively for an amateur, home too homely for a veteran.

Who would waste so much time growing something so immobile? Who would place value in a child that cannot repay its family?

The man's face coils, twisting but leaving an eye wide open and trained upon the still Lily.

This thing could not even choose to leave this room if it tried. Why bother allowing it the luxury of comfort so many of us are never entitled to?

He spares no moments longer glaring at the flower, returning to his commute as his silhouette, too, fades into a distant crowd.

The Lily just sits there, as if to allow this man and his energy to become someone else's problem.

Though it may still face the same direction out this window, the flowers around it shift from the fan, like the Hydrangea, which turn ever, ever-so-slightly to greet the Lily.

It glances back with an invisible motion of joy, and soon the Orchids join, swaying in their little nook above the room.

"It's nice to have a sun so bright, yeah?"

It does not possess a voice, but the Princess of Fauna has allowed her dominion to enjoy one other's company.

"I do wonder why our master put me here and you up there," the Lily replies. "Is sunlight not more important for you?"

"We share the same opening, you and I. Your light is my light."

They pause, as if awaiting a response from the Chrysanthemum.

The Violets chime in, "Be still, our master is on its way here."

Moments trickle by for the Lily before it can respond.

"To merely rain water on us again? Or perhaps to allow me new scenery?"

"I cannot understand-"

The paper door slides open in the room's shade.

A silhouette remains there in the doorway, head scanning the room.

Eyes fall on the Hydrangea, then the Violets, then the Orchids, then finally, the Lily.

Ceiling fan twirling above, the figure enters the room, marching directly to the windowsill.

Pedestrians pass by, taking glances at the woman who grasps the pot.

Long, black hair doubles as a curtain, obscuring most of her face and leaving but half of it in the sunlight.

And though the Lily has no eyes, their gazes lock all the same.

“Oh, Michi, enjoying the sunlight, dear?”

The Lily can't help but wonder:

Michi...? A human name, bestowed upon me?

Is that to mean a human and a flower can be equal?

“It's the morning, so you can just wait here and get all the sunlight you'll need for the day~”

Another day at this windowsill? I believe-

“Oh, hmm, is that bothering you, dear?”

This one can hear me?

“Mmm, no need to be shy, I always look after my plants first—I'll sacrifice anything so long as you can be at peace with yourself!”

Anything?

"Please, tell it to me straight: is this windowsill not spacious enough? Are the passersby bothering you? You look healthy, surely that's not your concern, is it?"

The Lily would breathe for a little respite, if only they could.

But if their master could actually hear them, what does that mean for them both? That their master is a flower? That Michi is a human? That their master could speak with plants? That Michi could somehow communicate with people?

Did it even bear thinking about-?

"Can you actually hear me?"

There it is... a deep, smooth voice for a flower: one that had no physical presence, but resonated all the same as something Michi could hear.

"Ooh, yes! Yes, don't be afraid, this is private conversation, just you and me. Your friends will not hear us, my family will not hear us."

A chance to ask for something... something new, perhaps? Even if that barrier between a new desire and an unknown, repressed one was slim, they could ask for it all the same, right?

"Master... My roots lie here at this windowsill, and yet, I long to feel how normal flowers live: no pots nor vases to confine them."

The woman cups her chin with her hands, then clutches the vase tightly.

"Oh, is that so? Could you tell me more?"

"Unlike humans, we are not meant to be mobile creatures, but do we not deserve our sun all the same? Do we not all deserve to experience our sunlight without this near-invisible wall between us?"

"Don't worry Michi, I understand... Have you been speaking with the other flowers lately?"

"The Orchids yearn to be in my place, I sense. To experience as much of the sun's warmth as they need without these human constructs obscuring that light. Hydrangeas and Violets are as odd as usual, your movement of them is enough, and they're content, yet I'm unable to feel... like a natural flower."

"Feel... like... D-Don't worry, I get that again, since I've grown you here in this pot your whole life. You've never felt how the world outside of it is, have you?"

"For my leaves to brush up against this wood on your construct is an odd sensation. I'm used to nothing, if not your touch alone."

"I get you... but if you can understand me, may I ask you something?"

"I see no harm."

"How does a flower like you perceive freedom? You're rooted your whole life, for someone like me, the thought's inconceivable..."

“Incomprehensible for me, too, is the thought of growing branches I may move myself with. I only yearn to live in the open air, to root myself in the planet that created me, to experience what so many other flowers like me have, to experience the only life they know.”

With a nod, the woman lifts up the pot, her nails almost digging into the vase.

“Don’t worry, I understand you—let us make the best of this!”

Michi just sits there, as if to let their unseen gaze bid farewell to the only room they have ever known.

Pot in hand, their master paces out the room and through some of the house’s corridors: simple, wooden halls that are nothing but echoey spaces for Michi.

Yet, here they were, speaking with a human who had felt so close yet so distant up to this day.

A connection between flora and fauna established... a warm one at that.

To experience open skies, to sense fresh airs, to sit amongst a field of flowers rooted into the very planet—no more will Michi have to remain in this cramped pot, that barrier separating them from humans had finally cracked, hadn’t it?

Here it is, the moment of truth, a space where all these factors converge into one: a garden.

Walls enclose a yard dominated by but one sound: splashing, trickling from a fountain that empties itself into a short stream. Across both sides are beds of flowers and plots of trees, leaving plenty of room for even more shrubbery to thrive in what would otherwise be empty grass.

A gentle gust from the sky sways one of Michi's leaves, but this time, there is no wood to brush up against.

"Here we are dear, my garden! A sanctuary for my plants who wish for this life the most."

"I am included now amongst the garden plants, yes?"

"Oh, almost, just *almost*! Let me move you a bit further in here."

Balancing the pot on one hand, the master crosses a little bridge over the stream and sits back on a stone, setting down Michi's vase just in front of her by her feet.

"This is it: that open place you've asked me for. How does it feel?"

"Breeze is cool, natural, and the light is warm, like a tree's shade on an arid day."

A second of silence passes as another small puff of wind sways Michi, black-and-white doves flying above from tree to tree.

"In this place, I have no need for conversations or observations to be content... I feel loved in the environment."

"Aww, good to hear! It's all I've ever wanted to hear, really..."

"...I sense it, however, that I am still in the vase that confines me."

"Oh-?"

"Would there not be a way to root me into the planet where I belong? To root me with other flora I can find contentment with?"

The woman draws a deep breath, rubbing a hand against that vase.

"B-But this vase— Ahem... Michi, trust me, transplanting you into this soil out here would harm you. Right now, right here, you have everything you need, don't you?"

"In essence I am free, but in form, I am not with those I belong."

"As in, you think you're an outsider here?"

"If I am within this pot, then yes. I can sense and hear the flora here are calling for me to come near."

"Then- don't worry, we can do that!"

Standing, the master picks up Michi's pot again, transferring it to a corner of the garden where other lilies grow from the grass.

"Here! Flowers just like you, is it better?"

"They are not confined by the roots as I am within this vase. It is all I yearn for: to experience what cycles I have left among those who cherish me."

She stares at Michi as she caresses the vase.

"If you could only see yourself the way I see you... You're perfect in this, it's not as if you can move anyways, right? Not to mention the composition of this soil- It's why you've grown so well, you know!? All of this I procured just for your growth."

"I do not understand, but do you mean to bestow me the name of 'special'?"

"As a description I suppose... You were the first Lily I grew well, but I sacrificed a lot to let you live so peacefully... this vase is both a memento of loss and a medal of triumph: it's what makes you *you*, yeah?"

"You mean to bestow the label of 'honour' to this thing I am confined in?"

"Don't worry Michi, it's just how you see it. Don't think of this vase as something that holds you back—rather, think of it as a blessing- a privilege! None of these flowers will ever live as comfortable as you, you wouldn't want to lose that, would you?"

The breezes stop coming.

"I find it difficult to sense it that way, master. How many cycles do you believe remain before I, too, shall wilt away? Why must I be forbidden from living those with my brethren when the opportunity is already here?"

"Don't worry, it's not just about me, but think of the other flowers- they'll know you as that one Lily that threw away such a luxurious gift in favour of being one with everyone else. You may not be human, yet I've heard of flora acting much like us... you wouldn't want that."

Before Michi can send a response, the woman stands, pacing a few steps away.

They tense up, echoing the loudest shriek they can at her.

"Wait! Please remain here!"

"...O-Oh-?"

"All I ask is to be moved from this vase, so that I may live my remaining cycles with the other lilies. Is such a request too much when you have bestowed me the title of 'special'?"

"Y-You are special, Michi, that's why we can't have you lose what makes you so."

"Even if it were to come at the cost of my contentment?"

“...I suppose so. We have to draw the line somewhere, you know? You’re really special to me, so I want to keep it that way. I know you’ll understand.”

Like all those people outside the windows, Michi’s master, too, fades away, disappearing back into the mansion they had spent so much time in.

Michi just sits there, as if, by some inexplicability, this vase would shatter and grant them what their master would not.

This here is the scent, the feeling, the mood of what freedom can be for a flower... and yet, the height of that concept fleets away second by second.

Here is an open garden, yet one enclosed by human walls.

Here is a clean sky, yet one tainted by human development.

Here is a safe space, yet one denied by human intervention.

The ground here is but a little gust away: a simple breeze allows Michi’s leaves to stroke the grass and stones like the wood from the home.

But this is the only freedom they can hope to achieve: so close to life with its fellow flowers, so close to a peaceful end as what they were meant to be, and yet so far, parried, parted, and forced back by a human they thought was a friend.

Any minute now, that sun will set like every other day, and by then, Michi will have received more than enough warmth to last another cycle.

And yet, like any other day, they will soon find themselves under the exact same care of their master, perhaps the exact same routine too, from someone who claimed to be gifting them their ideal life.

Of course, here is that ideal life as promised. It's right here, with all these lilies and shrubs that Michi knows they will soon daydream many lovely conversations with.

All it would take to join them in bliss would be for their master to return and move them out of this vase.

Michi just sits there, still saturated with naive hope that they will find true contentment before the time comes for them to wither away.