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Category: Short Story

Just as We Are

"Just As We Are"

"Wait for me, Don!" exclaimed Linda as she hurriedly sped towards her closest confidant, Donna Miller. Zooming past the sounds of aggressive car honks and small conversations, she could barely block out the noise. The smell of freshly-painted walls and newly-furnished cement roads wafted in the air, inducing minimal excitement for their typical school day.

It was 1958.

And Linda Greene was sweating bullets in the midst of Valentine's Day.

When she almost caught up to Donna, she made a struggle to collect what was left of her breath and exclaimed, "I said wait, you little rascal!"

Donna playfully turned around and spoke, "Yeah, hurry up, Linda. Stop taking so long."

The 1950s.

After the arduous war, the massive migration to suburban cities facilitated the Greene family's journey from buzzing New York to a slower New Jersey. The newfound prosperity increased multiple economic opportunities, and the Greens established their flower shop on the corner of Primrose Grove and Clover Avenue in Collingswood.

As Donna and Linda approached Lemon Public High School, there was a commotion at the front gate. They peeked through the student body's curious heads. They caught a glimpse of the impeccable Charlotte Jane Price with her new apparent Spanish boyfriend, Luis.

Just the notion of ever wanting to think about this girl made Linda's heart wrench in frustration at the lack of her abilities. Her platinum blonde hair seemed to strikingly glow as Linda held a lock of her short brunette bob, and Charlotte Jane's voluminous body seemed so sculptured compared to Linda's useless cellulite.

Finally, Charlotte's bright blue eyes captivated all those who sneaked a look at her.

Yet, Linda never forgot the incident three years ago at the science fair, when she saw Charlotte Jane deliberately spilling cherry red paint on Linda's flower exhibition without explanation.

Linda never forgot the crooked smile on the blonde girl's face as it became disfigured in Linda's mind.

She hurriedly left the scene in contempt, somehow even feeling more tired than before.

Sitting in her usual seat centered between busybodies, Linda sat in silence, feeling as if the world was seen from her viewpoint, and she was the only spectator.

She looked around the classroom.

Charlotte Jane Price. It was her again.

She was sitting next to the window in the back seat, surrounded by people, and carrying a strong sense of herself. The more Linda paid attention, the more Charlotte's eyes seemed to be a subtle periwinkle color. Only when Linda saw this seemingly perfect girl the world, in a strange yet tempting way, turned even slower than usual, and the noise began to fade even more.

Filled with hopelessness, she realized that she was in the presence of an impeccable woman, and it was only right to become dazed by her beauty.

Linda scoffed, and as she turned to talk to Donna, the memory of Charlotte Jane's eyes barely lingered in Linda's thoughts.

Linda walked back to her home, and then immediately entered the packed flower shop to help her parents with the flower sale for this day of love.

Then, just as the shop was about to close, an African-American girl no older than Linda entered with an elegant smile.

"Good evening, may I take a look at some flowers?" she said.

Linda looked at the clock and then back at the girl. Her parents were in the backyard tending to more flowers, so Linda thought no fault about taking another customer.

"Sure," Linda stated with a smile on her face.

Then the girl began to slowly perceive her surrounding area, moving from flower to flower. She said that her name was Timberly Smith and that she was here to buy flowers for her parents.

"How about these purple hydrangeas? The petals are in excellent condition, and they are a form of familial love." Linda suggested.

"Or how about the passionate scarlet roses? The chrysanthemums?"

Timberly kept looking around until something finally caught her eye. There was a bouquet of large sunflowers in the corner of the shop that had recently been cut. They seemed to be larger than usual, almost as if they encompassed the girl as she placed them into her hands.

She said, "I will take these."

After giving the girl some change for her payment, Linda's parents came back with a bouquet of an assortment of flowers. Her mother said that they had an excess of flowers left, and it would be a pity if they wilted without reason.

However, Timberly was already having trouble holding the huge sunflower bouquet in her petite hands. Linda wanted to help her out, so she grabbed the other bouquet and headed outside with Timberly.

"Come right back in time for dinner!" Her father said, exchanging small glances with her worrisome mother.

"I'll be right back!" Linda spoke in reassurance.

Timberly gave Linda a heartfelt smile, and Linda turned to follow her.

They passed the suburban neighborhood, and Linda grew somewhat uneasy within the atmosphere. Nonetheless, she kept following Timberly, glaring at the peers who turned to whisper to their friends about the "sight" in front of her.

"Where are your parents?" Linda asked.

"They are at the church, resting," Timberly said.

Suddenly, the two girls appeared to be at the back of a small yet sophisticated Christian church.

Instead of going towards the main building, Timberly went towards the cemetery. This was when Linda realized that Timberly's parents were indeed resting, six feet underground.

Approaching a wooden cross that was carved "SMITH," Timberly came out of the sunflowers' embrace and placed them onto the patch of dirt.

Linda could only stare at Timberly, the cross, and, especially, herself. She felt so utterly useless and could only say,

"I give my best regards. They are in a safer, warmer place."

Linda could only sympathize; she dare not even ask. However, she knew that the malicious people's glares continue to look over the many bodies situated in the graveyard.

"I sometimes wonder if I was pushed into the pot of luck and arrived in a wealthier household, then I may have enjoyed the finest chocolates, basked in the glorious sun, and continued to see my family every day after school...

But now that I am fully content with the fact that I live this life for them, I feel rushing waves of happiness. I have found love in everything, even with my curves and edges."

Before she could place down her bouquet, Timberly plucked out only the purple hyacinth flowers from the assortment bouquet and told Linda to keep the rest. Linda could not help but wonder if Timberly took the hyacinths on purpose and why she felt the awful feeling of gut-wrenched relief.

Linda went to the flower shop and home that night and woke up feeling different from usual, almost as if something was calling to her.

After school, her parents told her that she needed to deliver a flower order for the Price family that recently came in. Linda felt a little reluctant about delivering it, but her conscious and overall benevolence forces her to just give the delivery.

Everyone knows the Price house, as Charlotte sometimes hosts late-night parties for her friends. She calmly knocked on the door, but there was no sound.

Just as she was about to turn, Linda felt her stomach churn as if there was a disruption.

Then, as Linda went to the backyard, she saw Charlotte Jane's father slapping her.

Linda noticed her small yet now noticeable bruises only slightly covered by the fading make-up over her body.

When Linda turned to look at the girl, she expected helplessness, but all she got was piercing sharp eyes that told her to go. Linda dropped the flowers, but she didn't move not one bit.

All she did was stand there. Only until Charlotte yelled "go" did she flee the scene.

She knew it was wrong, but the look in the girl's eyes so strikingly told her, "what can you do?" Linda knew that all she could do was run.

That night, Linda tossed and turned; she saw herself surrounded by an endless disarray of nature under a blazing blue sky. Little bits of sunflowers, lilies, chrysanthemums, daisies, orchids, and roses just splattered across patches of grass.

However, the grass began to wilt, and there was nothing Linda could do so she sat there in the grass, watching the flowers die one by one.

When she awoke the next day, Linda felt devoid of the human spirit; in her room, she could no longer smell the flowery refreshing scent that usually rejuvenated her soul in the mornings.

Linda met Donna during her stroll to school and struck up a friendly conversation.

When they arrived at their school, a strong flowery scent came across her face.

Undulating waves of sickly sweet flowers haunted her in every place of the school campus.

When she turned to Donna, the scent came in like a punch, so much so that Linda began to tremble and cover her mouth.

"What's wrong, Linda?" Donna questioned.

"Just felt a little queasy after walking in the boiling sun," said Linda, as she dragged herself through the entrance of the school.

At that moment, she saw Charlotte Jane, and they walked past each other as if nothing ever happened. Much to her

surprise, Linda could not smell anything. She took a double take and longed for that numbness again. Hence, she parted ways with Donna and followed Charlotte Jane to her homeroom, which was also Linda's homeroom.

Today, Charlotte Jane's familiar figure became more distorted in Linda's eyes. She was devoid of all life. Linda could no longer see her flawless figure and only saw the foundation seeping into her skin to cover up her bruises. However, Linda felt a little relieved that such beauty could falter and could not decide whether she loved or hated this relief.

Still, Linda just stood there, not knowing how to feel or what to do, blocking her nose from the wretched saccharine smell surrounding her.

Linda ran to the bathroom.
She went straight to the sink and washed her face.
She looked in the mirror.

Brown eyes and brown hair.
Ever since the day of the science fair, Linda wondered if her efforts mattered at all.
Every day felt the same to her, and Linda pondered on the presumption whether an average adolescent girl from a flower shop could change the world.
Linda just strived for some purpose to her agonizingly average life.

Thus, she despised her annoyingly normal life, and the more she thought about it, the more the smell dispersed.

Nonetheless, she didn't know what to do in this current situation.
Charlotte's periwinkle eyes seemed even duller than ever before. Should she tell her parents? Should she confess to the school? Should she confront Charlotte's parents?

All of these questions attacked her head, but her inner conscience grew even more confused.

Linda was dreading to come home because she knew that the flowers would come to flood her with an enduring scent. Therefore, she just stood outside the flower shop, away from just everything.

Then, she saw a small figure that resembled Timberly slowly approaching her within the flower shop's parameters.

When they came face to face, Linda took a breath in and felt the cold breeze surround her.

"Timberly, how pleasing it is to be seeing you today!" Linda fondly spoke.

"I could very much say the same to you; how refreshing it is to meet you again," Timberly stated with much enthusiasm.

"Is the flower shop open today?"

Linda hesitated and reassured herself that Timberly would cancel out the sickening scent in the flower shop. She proceeded to say,

"We are currently open. Would you like to take a look inside?"

"No, thank you. I wanted to make sure that you were doing well and to give you this," said Timberly as she gave Linda a small, intricate straw doll figurine in the shape of a girl.

Linda took the doll, and her face lit up with gratitude.

"This is the first time that a friend has given me such a heartfelt handmade craft. Thank you for your gift!"

"I have a matching one! It will help you when you feel a little lost, much like it helped me after my family passed. I wanted to thank you for helping me mourn for my loss," Timberly said in an ever so soft tone.

They both smiled and then parted ways.

Linda looked graciously at the doll, and she felt it exude a silver of a breeze, much like dancing across the sky.

When she went to bed that night, the vivid dream once again seeped into her brain: flowers were wilting in the decaying prairie beneath her feet.

However, this time, she saw Charlotte Jane and Timberly standing and facing each other.

The ground beneath Charlotte Jane was even more decayed than Linda's; there were only ashes of what seemed like shriveled flowers.

On the contrary, Timberly stood on a luscious grass meadow filled with simplest yet majestic blooms of daisies and sunflowers.

Linda turned to look at her own patch of flowers and grass, and they seemed so frail and withered compared to Timberly's domineering flowers. Linda felt so pathetic that she wished to be like Charlotte Jane, where there seemed to be worried at all in her patch of nothingness.

She wept. She despised herself. She despised that she cannot change a single thing about herself and the environment she grew up in. As Linda fell into a momentary state of chaos, she saw something glint out the corner of her eye.

There it was, the straw figurine that Timberly made for her, laying in Linda's unlively grass. Linda wanted to cry, even more, realizing how pathetic she looked. She picked up the doll and held it close to her body.

All at once, she felt an undeniable rush of warmth. The area around her turned into a splash of green. The grass began to heal, and Linda saw her flowers starting to reach for the clouds again.

Then she understood. She understood the reason why Charlotte Jane seems so dull despite living a perfect life and why Timberly seems so exuberant despite losing her family.

We cannot choose our family, city, or livelihood, but we can choose how to thrive regardless of those conditions.

Suddenly, Linda awoke, changed clothes, and filled her bags with compost material for the shop's plants.

Running past her parents making breakfast, she shouted, "I'll be back after a stroll in the neighborhood!"

Linda knew what she had to do.

She arrived at the Price household, fully prepared for whatever was going to happen, and she stopped momentarily.

She basked in the sunlight, swallowed her doubts, and took a breath of the crisp air.

Her soul had never felt so overflowing with fondness for her individualism.

Linda slowly opened her backpack to the compost she had taken from the garden.

Before she could lose grasp of the pride she had pulled together, Linda began to climb the Price house to the roof.

Looking down at the backyard, there they were.

Charlotte Jane was just standing there with disheveled features and an unfazed look on her face, so beaten from taking too much for too long.

Her father gave no expression to her defeated state or the leather belt in his hand.

Like petals falling from the sky, Linda let the compost completely cover all areas of his rounded balding head. Linda smirked at the seemingly perfect end to her plan, an ideal demise.

She hurriedly jumped down and gripped Charlotte Jane's hands without looking back, losing everything but herself.

Linda ran through the neighborhood under the hot sun, not letting go despite Charlotte Jane's efforts to slow her down.

Finally, when Linda reached the end of the block, she turned around and took a good look at the person who doesn't

even remember her name.

"Who are you, and what did you just do?" Charlotte Jane said in a low stern voice.

"You have caused eternal hell to come after you."

Linda just stood there. However, this time, she grinned and shouted, "Who cares!" Then, she just laughed out loud and gave Charlotte Jane a warm hug.

The Price girl, astonished yet somewhat relieved, did not know how to react. This was the first time she knew that some part of her mentality escaped her abusive father. Staring at the girl she did not remember, she slowly but surely moved her hands to clasp the girl who fell from the sky and momentarily saved her.

Linda then looked at the girl whom she despised yet envied all long. Regardless, Linda agreed that in this way, Charlotte Jane was even more perfect than before.

Linda could see the girl's light, and just like that, there seemed to be sweet roses on Charlotte Jane's feet, just feeding on the illumination she now emanated. Linda could feel the girl's true spirit despite all the corporeal blemishes on her features; she was glowing unlike ever before.

"You're really beautiful, you know that?" Linda spoke earnestly in the moment, captivated by all her grandeur.

Charlotte Jane, who was used to such words but not at the tone of her voice, was confused and startled, yet filled with sheer happiness from the bottom of her heart. She managed to gather up the small amount of dignity she believed that she had left and questioned while looking in desperation and hope,

"What is your name?"

Linda perked up and was rather disappointed by the fact that her internal archnemesis forgot her name. She stood proud that she could confess who she was as her new self-awakening.

"My name is Linda Greene. Your name is Charlotte Jane Price. Now, let's go, just as we are because we're so imperfectly perfect."