

[PROSE]

The Flowers Are So Pretty In October **Christina Wood**

I pushed back my chair and stood slowly, crossing my arms. After pacing from the wall back to my chair three times, I sat down again and stretched out my legs. I had been sitting in this room for hours, quite literally. Dad had left me with Tricia about four hours ago. Something had come up at his work and he needed to go back and take care of the problem, so he asked me to come and sit with Tricia.

So, sit I did. Tricia slept soundly, hardly seeming to move or even breathe. Sometimes I wondered if she really was still alive. I stood up to stretch again, and walked to the window. Underneath a slanting red drape, a tall vase of flowers sat on the windowsill. I brushed the wilting petals gently, letting them tickle my skin. They had been sitting on her windowsill for two months or more. Every time we asked if we could replace them, she refused to let us take the flowers, insisting that they were a gift, and had to stay. Her son, a Marine Captain, brought them for her on his last leave. He had been shot and killed while serving in Iraq nearly six weeks ago. Since that time, Tricia's healthy disposition fled, leaving her with a broken body.

I looked back at the sweet lady that I watched over now. Her gray, wrinkled skin lay still on her face, the corners of her mouth gently creasing as she breathed in and out. White, soft hair framed her quiet face, creating the perfect picture of a peaceful rest. With one small, gnarled hand, she clasped the worn comforter that covered her. Tears welled up in my eyes. I loved Tricia so much. She was a grandmother to me. Turning back to the window, I tried to blink the tears away. I heard a soft cough behind me, and looked back. Tricia's

[13]

[SCOPE]

eyes fluttered open, and she coughed weakly again. I stepped over to the bed and tried to prop her up as gently as I could. Tricia leaned back against the pillows and coughed again, louder this time. “Thanks, sweetie.” She gasped quietly and closed her eyes again.

I thought she was falling asleep again, but after several minutes, she reopened her eyes and gazed steadily at me. “Do you know something, dear?”

“What is it, Mama Tricia?” I asked, as I realized that her voice sounded much stronger than it had earlier. “Do you know that I’ve always wanted to die in October? My grandmother, do you remember her? She died in October. So did my nephew, poor little thing.” Tricia stopped and sucked in air slowly. I placed my hand on her arm, hoping she wouldn’t keep going on about people dying.

“My uncle died in October too. It’s a lovely month to die. The flowers are so pretty in October.” Tricia’s voice trailed off and she looked past me to the window. The late afternoon sun rays slipped through the half-closed blinds and lit the vase of once-orange flowers. “See, aren’t they beautiful?” Her eyes closed, and a peaceful smile settled on her tender face. Once again, tears threatened to spill down my checks, but I managed to rein them in. “Don’t talk like that, Mama Tricia. It’s all going to be ok soon. Please don’t talk about dying like that.” My voice squeaked as I spoke.

Tricia’s eyes opened partially, and she stared fixedly at me. “Why, dear? It’s a fact of life. It must end sometime. No one wants it to go on forever. See the flowers? They will end someday too. But not yet. Not yet. The flowers are so pretty

[14]

[PROSE]

in October.”

“But they are finished!” I nearly cried when the words burst from my mouth. “See how wilted and brown they are?” But Tricia shook her head and whispered, “Not yet, not yet.” Then she closed her eyes and fell again into her peaceful slumber. I paced that small room for hours, fighting myself inside. The joy and certainty Tricia felt was evident, and it confused me. Dad didn’t return until nearly seven o’clock that evening, and when he did, I had hit a fresh bout of tears and frustration.

When he walked into Tricia’s room, I ran to him and hugged him. “I don’t understand it, Daddy. I don’t know what she means!” The tears dripped from my eyes onto his light blue dress shirt. He still smelled faintly of cologne. He shushed me and smoothed my hair. “What don’t you understand, baby?”

“The flowers! She says the flowers are so pretty, and they aren’t finished with life, but look at them! They’re dead, wilted, disgusting, ready to be thrown out!” Daddy quieted me and held me tightly, letting me cry out my tears. A long time later, Tricia awoke and cleared her throat, very quietly. The two of us turned and stepped up to the bedside. The room was hushed, like it had stopped breathing and time stood still. The air was stifling and heavy. Tricia opened her eyes and breathed in, the air catching violently in her throat.

“Aren’t the flowers pretty, Dale? Just like you and your daughter.” My father nodded and took Tricia’s hand. She continued in a hoarse voice. “The flowers are so pretty in

[15]

[SCOPE]

October. I'm so glad that it's October." She closed her eyes and sank down into the pillows. Her breathing was slow and laborious. Dad patted her hand comfortingly, then placed it back on her blankets.

Quite suddenly, the heavy breathing ceased and Tricia's face seemed to relax. I thought she had just fallen asleep again, but one glance at Daddy's wet cheeks instantly changed my opinion. Through my own tears, I looked over at Tricia's flowers. As one small, brown petal broke from the stem and floated to the ground, I realized that it was still September.