

"the smallest woman
in the world" by
clarence lispector
essay



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In this story, I think that the author, Clarice Lispector, is trying to show the readers that, although we are supposedly living in this modern civilized day of life, we really should be envious of the simplicity and sincerity that " Little Flower" has in her life. It is sick and disturbing how people live today and view people that are so very diverse and different. The first woman's reaction that is described in the story is one that is disgusted by Little Flower's picture. She explains that she can't look at it a second time because " It gives me the creeps. The one little boy who saw her picture wanted to use Little Flower to scare his brother as a toy, as though she is some hideous creature. He explains, " Wouldn't he howl! " People seem to fear and be disgusted with things that are unfamiliar.

Little Flower lives in the deep Eastern Congo of Africa in the highest trees to save her from being eaten by savage Bahundes, and one may consider this a sheltered uncivilized life. In actuality, however, Little Flower was not scared or disgusted by Marcel Pretre; she answered his questions with kind eyes and facial expressions and " blinked with love and laughed warmly... She loved the explorer and his strange boots and ring.

She embraced the presence of a new, very different looking stranger.

Meanwhile, back in our so-called civilized world, people feared her appearance. One girl who was about to be married saw her picture and pitied her. She said to her mama, " Mama, look at her little picture, poor little thing! Just look how sad she is! " The author showed the different reactions of the people seeing Little Flower's picture in the paper as an example of how judgmental our society really is.

Little Flower actually isn't sad at all; she is happy to just be alive. She realizes how valuable life is and how quickly you can die or, in her case, be eaten. She is grateful to be bearing a child, and to have food and a home in the trees. It makes you think and realize how distorted our images are about what's normal and accepted.

Another example of how uncivilized we may be is when the family saw her picture and discussed how Little Flower could be their servant, saying, "Imagine her serving our table, with her big little belly! There is nothing civilized about slavery and servants. It is disturbing to realize that instead of our society being able to accept and embrace the amazement of such a simple yet fulfilled lifestyle, we result to criticizing and making fun of it. Little Flower is a happy, pregnant woman in Africa who should be seen as such and make us more grateful for what we have; not imagined as a cruel device for our own entertainment. The author is concluding the story by showing that the old woman is sure that there was a reason why Little Flower's species of human was put on this earth. By explaining that as she folds up the newspaper decisively, it shows that she is certain her existence is not an accident. The old woman has seen Little Flower's picture, thought about her and the fact that she's the smallest woman in the world and her purpose on earth, and has come to a conclusion, saying peacefully, "God knows what He's doing." I think the author does this to show that wisdom comes with age; the old woman is wise and isn't scared or flustered by Little Flower's existence.

She trusts in her faith that she is on this earth and is bearing a child for a reason. I think the conclusion is used to also express the idea that people

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come in all different shapes and sizes. Little Flower is a simple tiny woman living her own life in Africa, very different from those that we live in our so-called civilized life full of stereotypes, judgments and criticism. Throughout the story Little Flower is referred to as a dog, a monkey, a toy and a servant.

There's no reason to be scared of her or to refer her to something other than a human, which she indeed is, unless there is an element of threat that she possesses to these people. I think that is what Clarence is trying to demonstrate in this story. The people that are responding to her would rather categorize her as something foreign than realize that she is one of them, just a different version, in fear of their own species. Just as it was stated in the last line, " God knows what He's doing," we are all alive and on this earth for a reason, not excluding Little Flower.

If humans could learn to be more open-minded and accepting of the exciting differences in each person that make us individuals, than maybe we could reach that civilization that we are so persistently claiming.