

FLOWERS
A MONOLOGUE
BY JANE CAFARELLA

Time: The present. Sophie, 54, a social worker is explaining to a police officer why she should not be charged with theft.

Yes, sir. I *took* them. But I didn't *steal* them.

You say this is a public garden. You say these flowers are for the public. You say the local council created this beautiful botanic garden for the enjoyment of the public, with public money. Well, aren't I the public? I pay my rates. I've paid them for 23 years. This is my park, just as much as it's yours. Every morning I walk through it on my way to work, and every morning, I take one flower for the family most in need. One flower.

You say I should know better. I'm supposed to "set an example to my clients".

They're not clients. They're families. My families.

I've been a social worker in this city for 30 years now. I work with some of the most troubled families you'll ever see. Some families inherit money, my families inherit troubles - troubles like weeds, that keep coming back, no matter how many times you pull them out.

They never get flowers. They get waiting lists, fines and prison terms, or kids that die from drugs or suicide.

Sometimes, when I give them my flower, they cry because they are used to people taking, not giving.

You won't see them walking through these public gardens. Although sometimes you'll see they sleep in them. They don't feel entitled to walk beside the lovers hand-in-hand, the mothers sipping lattes and pushing fancy prams, the joggers with their headphones, the bike riders in their lycra. My families are trespassers in this garden of Eden - and in life.

You say, "If you wanna 'say it with flowers' ring Interflora." Sure. I can afford that - for a few weeks, or maybe even months. But that would leave some of my families with flowers, and some without. Haves and have nots. That would leave them exactly where they began, like every other short-term project to help the poor. My families don't like charity. They know it comes at a price.

I'm not denying it. I take those flowers and I say to my families, "This flower is for you. It's from a public garden, and the garden and the flowers are *yours*, because *you* are a member of the public."

So, you see, Sir. I don't steal those flowers. I perform a public service.

ENDS

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