

How the red hibiscus broke the law

The red hibiscus sat on the brown wooden windowsill all summer. At first she bloomed twice with flowers that kissed the air in red hues. Then, dramatically, she lost all her leaves. Maria, addicted to green, fell into despair. She went to organic and inorganic stores. So the red hibiscus got fertilizers: of all kinds. She still did not grow. The branches remained bare no green lifeless. All summer she stood on the windowsill while Maria was away. Nobody noticed her. Until Maria came back from home. "Look!" she told her lover. "Look at her, as if she's about to hug someone!" So it was. That's really what the little red hibiscus looked like. She had grown against the net of the window, with two arms stretched out left and right as far as they would grow. Not tall. Just wide, broad, like a river. So the broad green river of the hibiscus stood at the window, still silent, as if she were watching the brilliant color film called Fall.

As the Fall film show with its memorable high pitched sound of crickets got over, Maria became nervous: what would the hibiscus do now? Would the windowsill be warm enough? So Maria tried to move her away. Of course, there are odd people who think plants cannot talk. But the music is audible even to those who claim to be deaf, if only they would listen. Maria could not fail to see the disappointment in the newly growing strong green leaves of the hibiscus. "Give me my sun back!" she said. "My sun! My sun!" So Maria put her back on the windowsill, and there the hibiscus stood as if she were part of the solar system. Light and light and light and light. The hibiscus fell in love with the sun, and the sun fell in love with the hibiscus. There they were together, breaking out into a riot of rich green leaves so green that if you were a spider, you'd mistake the shade for a tropical forest. That's how shady rich green it was, enough for the human race to drown in as if they had never existed, which, as you know, would be ideal. The love story didn't just end with the thick rich green leaves. The once dead-looking brown branches now began sprouting little green hairs, just like the fur of a bear. "Hair?" said Maria, "now she has more hair than I!" Oh but time didn't stop and just when Maria thought the winter would never arrive, and Fall would magically slide into Spring, there arrived an ocean of snow storms, burying the world with white magic. Yet the hibiscus would not move from the windowsill. "Won't you be cold?" asked Maria. "Won't you like to come in close?" Still the branches stood, left, right, flowing like a broad green river, not looking back at Maria or at the bedroom, but only at the light.

So Maria then got into the habit of leaving the bedroom lamp on. Just so that the hibiscus would still have a twelve-hour day. And then she got a warm mist humidifier that heated water and blew out steam. So that she could pretend the hibiscus was growing in the monsoon rain.

Then all of a sudden, in early February, without any further ado, there was a tiny rosy bud on the hibiscus. "What!" said Maria. "A flower mid-winter?" Right on, Maria, said the hibiscus. Just wait and see. Then it happened one morning, when Maria was sleepily awake and thinking of one more reason why not to go to work: there it was, pure miracle, pure blessing: a hibiscus flower so tender red that it could be a baby's face. So unimaginably new born that it could be a whole new planet. Maria couldn't help but kiss it. If anyone in the world ever wanted to kiss anything, and if anyone in the world ever saw the hibiscus when they wanted to kiss something, and if anything in the world became a kiss more than all other things in the world, it was the little tender red hibiscus. Smaller than a new baby kitten, smaller than all newborn things on earth that winter morning there was the hibiscus, shaped like a kiss to the world.

But something more strange was to happen. Maria kissed the hibiscus, and when she came back from work in the night, she held her breath in shock. Why? Incredibly enough, there it was, the little tender red flower, kissing the world, still in full bloom! Somehow the hibiscus had missed the sunset! Somehow, somehow, the little red flower had forgotten to say goodbye to the sun! Or the sun had not said goodbye to the little red flower! There it stood in full bloom at midnight misted by the warm steam, as if it were lighting up the deep heart of a tropical forest that grows too thickly for the sunrays in the midst of light spring rain. There it again stood, in full bloom, as the sun rose the next morning. The petals only began to fold slightly as the afternoon light waned, and then shut after sunset.

That's when Maria began figuring out the secret love affair that the little hibiscus on her windowsill had hidden so far. It was no wonder the little hibiscus would not leave the windowsill! It was all because she was secretly in love with the sun! Or the sun was in love with her! Why would the tender newborn red flowers not say goodbye to the sun like all normal flowers? Why would they wait through the darkness of the winter night to kiss the morning golden light? Who knew? Was it not the sun's fault? After all, the sun was supposed to shine on all flowers equally, and then slide out of the picture in the evening. Instead, the sun had obviously been kissing the little red flower a little too often and a little more all day long! And then, maybe, secretly giving it gifts of light? Perhaps even a gift of memory from the time when the hibiscus was a tropical plant growing in a tropical rain forest tens of thousands of years ago when the flowers may bloom for days, unable to shut in the warm rainy heat. No one knew. And yet this wild rebellion, this anarchic flowering and

orderless sunlighting kept on happening. No one could do anything. Everyone was powerless. It was too deep a secret for intelligence agencies to find out, governments to govern over, or humans to rationalize. The truth was that no one knew. No one could even think about the ways in which they could know of what they did not know, that was the truth. And to complicate things, no one knew if it was the sun or if it was the hibiscus that broke the first law of all Laws that rule Suns and Flowers: the laws that say that Flowers Will Close When the Suns Set. So it was that it happened, and so it was that no one could do anything about what happened. And so it was that the little red hibiscus would bloom and the sun would tarry at the window, and both would never say farewell to each other at a normal time, just like all proper flowers and proper suns do.

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