

Going Organic

by S. Asher Sund

I should probably make it clear up front that I am not in my right mind, which I quite understand compromises the credibility of what I'm about to say. Without going into the history of my minor and somewhat more major psychotic episodes, my psychiatrist, unsure how finally to help me without restraint and forced intravenous medication, suggested as a last resort that I get a plant.

I went to the nursery one Saturday afternoon and picked up a rather nondescript plant with a picture of what its beautiful prickly red flowers for two months of blooming time in late spring would look like. The cashier said, "Are you sure you want this one?"

"Yes," I said.

"Suit yourself," he said, and took his barcode gun to the barcode sticker stuck to the side of the green plastic planter until it beeped. When handing me my credit card receipt to sign, he said, "Be careful."

"Be careful of what?" I said.

"I've heard about these plants. They can be very aggressive."

Somewhere between the nursery, the parking lot, my car and home, I lost the plastic plant tag with the plant's name and the picture of its red prickly flowers. I couldn't remember what it was called. I knew nothing about it except that it lived, and that was all that mattered.

"The plant lives; I live." That was the deal I made. The plant doesn't go crazy, is what I more than likely meant, and neither do I. It was a deal I was making with my unconscious with no guarantee, of course, that it would hold up its end of the bargain. But whatever the case, the plant didn't die. I lived. And I didn't go crazy. Or not overly so.

The problem was that around this same time—shortly after bringing the plant into my master bedroom where I set it up on the bureau across from my bed—my girlfriend decided to move in with me. She found the plant bothersome. She was tired of dusting its

long, leathery leaves. She wanted me to get rid of it. She told me at breakfast one morning that she was allergic to those types of plants.

"What type is it?" I said.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I'm allergic to all types of plants."

"But I made a very specific deal with that plant. Its life is in my charge, as is my own mental health."

"I don't care," my girlfriend said.

"You don't care about my mental health?"

"I don't even know what that means," she said.

My girlfriend was suspicious of my close relationship with the plant, but she basically dealt with it, until one day while making the bed, she found some potting soil between the sheets and a petal from the red prickly flower.

When I came into the bedroom from taking a shower, I found her packing her things in teary madness.

"What are you doing?" I said.

"It's either me or the plant," she said through her tears.

"Stay," I longed to say to her, but when I opened my mouth, it came out, "Stamen."

After she left, during the many days and nights I lay in bed without energy enough to kill myself, I forgot about the plant until one night I dreamt that I was greeting the queen of a distant country. "Take off my white glove," this queen said to me when I bowed before her. I took the lady's hand into my mouth to pull off the glove and then swallowed the glove until I began to choke. I woke up with one of the plant's dried leaves lodged in my throat.

I pulled it out, coughed until I caught my breath, and yelled at the plant sitting over on the bureau, "You are the cause of my unhappiness!"

The plant looked sad and wilted.

"I'm sorry," I said. I went to pet its dried leaves and feed it a spoonful of fish fertilizer. It responded very well to this, of course, but I realized then that I couldn't take care of this plant. The plant's many needs were much too overwhelming for me.

I set it in my backyard and wished it well. I told it to send me out some pollen next spring to let me know that it was safe and had found a new home. But it stayed right where I put it. It had grown attached, I guess, and because of the rainy weather over the next several weeks, it thrived, spread itself, overtook my beds, seeded the front lawn, and began growing on the roof. One day I opened the blinds in the living room to see nothing but the inside of the leaves, with a little light coming through.

The neighbors eventually complained and called a local weed control operation that arrived by van with a trained squad of exterminators. While they approached swat team style with their armed spray guns of toxic weed killer, one of the more senior exterminators yelled at me through a megaphone to step out of the house. I came out with my hands up, dressed in my bumblebee pajamas, and said, "First of all, this plant is not a weed and second of all, you can't kill it. You kill the plant and you kill me, for obvious reasons. I live there. I live inside that plant."

I pointed back to the carpel, as I've since learned to call it, surrounding my front door, inside which were the stigma and style. Farther back, inside the house, in the center of the kitchen, the ovary. Surrounding the house were the stamen, undulating in the breeze, calling to me somewhat sexually.

"Now if you don't mind," I said. "If you all are done here, I have some very important business to attend to."

