

The Orchid

This, she said, is love.

This, he answered, is an orchid.

True, she said, but it will teach us about love.

And how might that be?, he asked.

So she explained.

We will take care of it. After a while, it will lose all its flowers. We will be left with nothing but sticks and leaves. But we will care for it nevertheless. And if we do our job well, it will thank us by blooming again. If we learn to care, we will learn to love.

I see, he said, love is care and care will be rewarded.

So they began to care. They cared for the orchid together. They found it a cosy spot on the window sill with just the right amount of sunlight. They watered it and wiped its leaves clean of dust. Sometimes they even found themselves talking to it as if it were a person. And they enjoyed its flowers immensely, for they were quite exquisite indeed. Once a month, they gave it a little bath in rain water they collected especially for this purpose. But - as she predicted - after a while, the flowers

shrivelled up and fell off. One by one. In the end, only a barren stick remained.

Should we cut it?, he asked, unsure if he was prepared to let go of the last reminder of happy times.

Let's, she said, *so there can be room for something new to grow.*

After cutting the stick, the orchid seemed quite ordinary.

It's nothing much to look at, really, he thought.

There was a bunch of leaves and roots and lots of bark in which the orchid grew and which had the annoying tendency to stray far from the pot as if to explore for a better pot to stay in.

And now?, he asked.

And now, we keep caring, she said.

And so they did. They cared for it for weeks, for months, for years.

In the seventh year, he asked: *Isn't it time?*

Time for what?, she wanted to know.

To let go of this one, he said gently. *This one just won't bloom.*

Does it have to?, she asked.

I suppose so, he answered. It's a flower. It's supposed to be colourful and pretty.

Isn't it?, she wondered.

He looked at her. And then he looked at the orchid. For the first time really looked at it.

Its leaves were of a dark, mossy green, ever so slightly turned towards the sun and quite shiny since they only dusted each one of them carefully the day before.

Its roots were thick and strong and intertwined with each other in quite an interesting pattern. Some of the roots even peeked out of the pot. The tips of those little explorative roots were of a light green that seemed quite tender to him.

He looked at the orchid for a long time. It seemed strong, it seemed happy, it definitely flourished under their care - and he remembered all the time he spend with it and talked to it. What did it matter if it had flowers or not?

Why, he thought to himself, did I wait for beauty that was already there?

You are absolutely right, he said. Even if it never blooms again, I love it just the way it is.

He paused.

It looks happy, don't you think?, he said smiling.

Very happy, she said.

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