

## HANAHAKI

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665 words

Behind me the farm. Hilly. Range fencing crisscrossing fields of alizarin crimson and green azurite. The crackling yellow blue sky makes me feel I'm inside a medieval painting. From the farm, there is a path through a forest and then the harbor. The water is a dark denim blue with threads of white in the late afternoon light.

I stand at the burnished shore wanting to live my life as a farmer. Grow garlic and tomatoes, milk the cows, ride the tractor, and wave every morning to the two horses grazing on the hill. No worries about where the next idea for a painting would come from, or the next story. I would never have to make clever small talk to people while waiting for the elevator. Instead, I would have pancakes every morning, and a big shaggy dog would follow me into the barn. He would lay in the shade of the door while I built my canoe.

But though I loved that farm, the farm didn't love me. It didn't ask me to stay. It let me go. And so once again during that summer in Maine, I could feel my lungs slowly fill with flowers and the petals bursting from my mouth whenever I spoke. I knew right away what this was, this ailment which has plagued me all my life – a terrible love for someone who will never love me in return.

In the beginning, the doctors told me that although it was persistent, it was a mild case. The initial symptom is a slight cough caused by the tendrils of longing and hope that start to flourish at the back of my throat. One day, the first petal unfolds on my tongue. Softly. Bitterly. In the weeks that follow, pining for what will never be mine, I begin to sputter and cough, my lungs slowly congesting with the flowers born of my longing. It is hard to eat. I cannot sleep. Petals constantly expel from my mouth. I am covered in them. I try to hold myself together in the company of others, silent and nodding in agreement to whatever they say. But sometimes the pressure of loving and not being loved causes the petals to become multitudes, filling my lungs

and throat, spewing from my mouth like a thunder. And before I can tighten my lips, clamp my teeth, I cough, and flowers by the thousands explode from my mouth, embroidering the air in a storm of blossoms.

Thank god, you and no one else can see them, these petals floating in the air between us .... honeysuckle, peony, jasmine, snapdragon, hibiscus, roses. You come and go completely oblivious to the garden that trails you. Through the years, I have managed to suppress my hopes and longings, the terrible ease that causes me to fall in love. Most people think I am unusually subject to colds or to the flu. My constant coughing at times is really unbearable. Sometimes I wish I had a cat or a dog so I can say I am allergic.

But I have grown older, and you have caused the worst symptoms. My doctors now say that although my lungs have become weakened over time, I would have survived if it were not for you making me breathless. Soon, they say, the congestion of flowers in my lungs will be unsupportable, and I will be asphyxiated.

But there is a solution. An operation. Somewhat like removing tonsils or an appendix. The doctors assure me that because of their experience with countless successful surgeries, there is only one side effect. And that is, by removing the tumor that causes the flowers of unrequited love to grow, removes from me forever the ability to love.

Oh, to be with you, alone, on a canoe traveling over the denim blue water, beneath the crackling yellow blue sky, your fingers trailing on the white thread of waves, glittering in the sun.