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# Black, Green or Cursed?

by Lisa Shaw

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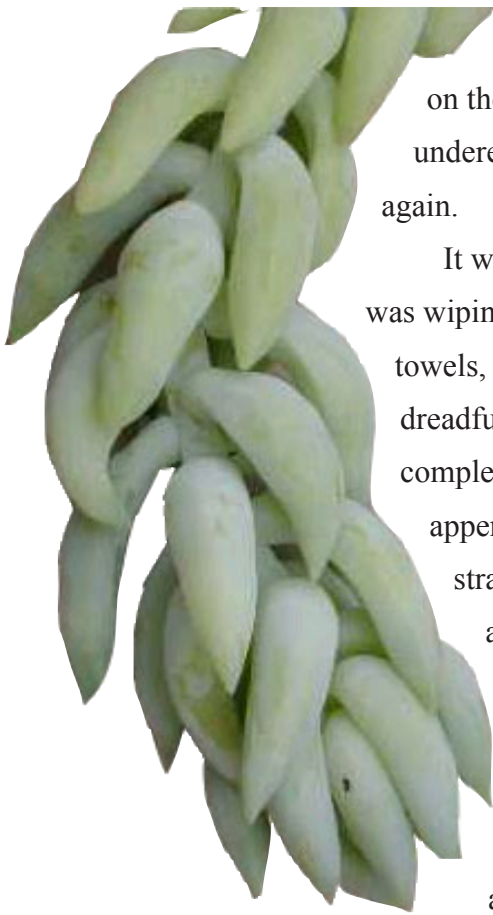
Most people will claim that they have either a “green thumb” or “black thumb”, as it relates to their ability to tend to plants; the color of my thumb, however, is irrelevant, as it is simply cursed with bad luck. I’ll take my share of responsibility for killing a few plants in my day, sure — there was my sister’s fern that I may have forgotten to water, and everyone’s heard the story about mom’s spice collection – but on the whole, my plants are simply cursed. The natural world must have it out for them, bad karma maybe, but whatever the case, it’s never a good idea to leave me alone and accountable for any type of flora’s well-being. My cactus is proof of this, as it has suffered the worst fate, hands down.

It was a blistery winter night, late in February, when I finally indulged my roommate and agreed to host another party in our tiny apartment. She sent out the facebook invitations, purchased the alcohol, and we began the arduous task of party-prepping our humble abode. All the breakable décor — vases, candy dishes, photographs — was collected and stowed away, retreating into bedroom closets and desk drawers. Plastic dishware was set out, furniture was rearranged, and our scientific method for proofing the place was followed to the T. Except for one small oversight: the plants.

I’ve always had an appreciation for plants, and during my freshman year of college, I decided I should invest in a cactus. Not only would it provide a permanent source of greenery in order to, quite literally, spruce up the room, but it would be the type of vegetation that is virtually un-killable. As far as I was concerned, it was a win-win. So I went to Meijer on a mission, and returned to my dorm room an hour later, vegetative companion in hand. Technically a member of the succulent family, this cactus wasn’t your stereotypical spine-covered, sharp-edged assaulting type of plants — quite on the contrary, actually, with its smooth, thick jade-colored limbs that stuck out of every long viney stem. The largest central vine stood perfect straight, sprouting directly from the middle of the pot, standing at a height of about six inches.

Over the course of every subsequent semester, that cactus flourished. It easily outgrew its original home, and became a jumbled mass of viney boughs, curved and tangled around one another, and always growing in the direction of sunlight. Apparently the plant appreciated my erratic watering schedule, combined with the propensity to rest, undisturbed and completely ignored, in the corner of the living room for weeks on end. Regardless of the reason, that cactus had doubled in size by the time I was a junior, and I had become quite fond of it.

And it was there the cactus sat, alone in the corner (save for one of my roommate’s leafy disasters that she called ivy), on that fateful night in February. Sitting out as centerpieces for all of our partygoers to admire, the plants stood their ground, as neither my roommate nor I had thought to include them



on the valuable-items migration, perhaps overestimating their resilience and underestimating drunken people's curiosity. This is a mistake I will never make again.

It wasn't until the morning after, while heading up the clean-up crew that was wiping down sticky kitchen counters and beer-soaked napkins and paper towels, did I notice that my cactus wasn't quite its normal self. In fact, it looked dreadful. Every main vine was doubled over and lying on its side, all of the limbs completely weak. As I gingerly began an inspection, I noticed that the plant's appendages were unusually heavy to pick up, and the leaf-like attachments were strangely enlarged. Breaking off one of the tiny buds, it surprised me with an initial sputter of water, which then turned into a steady drip, as if the breaking point were a leaky faucet head. All of a sudden the events of last night became blatantly obvious. After sniffing the pot soil, my suspicions were confirmed — someone had emptied probably an entire can of beer onto my cactus last night, as some kind of sick entertainment ploy or just a really shotty stab at gardening. I attempted resuscitation of my beloved cactus, removing it from the pot in an effort to dry out the roots, but in was no use — all of my attempts were futile.

Glancing over at my roommate's plant, however, I was surprised to see that it remained completely unharmed. Had this been intentional ambush, a personal attack perhaps? No, I doubted it, especially after considering my previous plant history: the bamboo that had been dropped during a move, or its predecessor, Spiny, which had become infested with insects. No, I chalked this one up to The Curse. And as I stood there clutching the swollen stems of my dear plant, I vowed to never again subject another one of nature's creatures to my inextricably ill-fated, star-crossed thumb.