

Budding Friendships

Ugh! The bugs are so bad this season, buzzing around, consuming and destroying, they're driving me crazy. Seriously, what's going on? this is so much worse than usual...

Hmm.... there seem to be more over here... Oh no, it's the new neighbor isn't it? All this because of one careless neighbor, and before you know it we're all overrun with pests.

It seems there is no choice, I'll have to confront them about it, I can't possibly just let this go on, something must be said.

Kala : Yoohoo! Neighbor! How ya doin? Seeing as we are neighbors now I figured a proper introduction is in order. My name's Kala, what's yours?

Hefy : Oh, hello, my name's Hefy, nice to meet you.

Kala : The feeling's mutual. So how do you like the neighborhood? Settling in ok?

Hefy : Oh yes, it's lovely. Great weather, lots of rain and sunshine, excellent soil, it's a great place to grow.

Kala : Yes it is, Y'know that's actually something I wanted to talk to you about.

Hefy : Oh, what do you mean?

Kala : The growing conditions around here are great, you're right about that, but we all gotta do our part to help keep it that way, wouldn't you agree?

Hefy : Yes, of course. It's important to live in harmony with nature and keep our environment healthy and balanced.

Kala : Glad we're on the same page. So do you already have some plans on how you're gonna get rid of that growing infestation of critters?

Hefy : Oh my... Umm... I'm not so sure that I ...

Kala : I can recommend some nice strong pesticides that will clear it up right quick.

Hefy : Heavens... I mean... that seems a bit extreme. I'm already using some aromatics and oils that help keep them away from sensitive areas and prevent them from getting out of hand.

Kala : Those hippy-dippy oils won't do the job at all. You're gonna need high potency, like alkaloids, something good n' toxic that will make them think twice about coming back for another bite.

Hefy : But I don't want to hurt them. As long as they don't get too out of hand and stay away from certain areas then I'm fine with them.

Kala : You gotta be kidding, if you give these critters an inch they'll take a mile.

Hefy : Thanks for the advice, but I'm not having any troubles with them, at least not yet. I'll keep your advice in mind and if things ever get out of hand I'll consider it, but for now I'm going to try to live and let live. They aren't bothering me right now so I think we can coexist in harmony.

Kala : By the time you realize they're out of control it'll be too late.

Hefy : Thanks, I really do appreciate your concern, but for now I'll take my chances I guess.

Kala : O.K. have it your way, just don't come cryin' to me when you're overrun with pests.

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The bugs are acting weird, their numbers always peaked this season, but now they swarm this neck of the woods like crazy for a few days, then move on.

Why the heck are they showin' up for such a flash in the pan frenzy like this?

Wait... They seem more concentrated over there. Oh no! That new-age neighbor has gone and gotten overrun, haven't they. Maybe the sudden frenzy is actually broods hatching.

Kala : Hey neighbor, you still up and kickin'? Have those pests claimed another victim?

Hefy : Oh, hi there, I'm fine, doing great actually, thanks for asking.

Kala : It's been a while since we spoke, how are you managing?

Kala Great! I'm loving the beautiful weather this year. How about you?

Kala : Yes the weather is quite nice... But... Those bugs! They're really starting to show up in droves. They seem to be really swarming you over there. Are you ready to look into some pesticides yet?

Hefy : Oh no! We are doing just fine.

Kala : We?

Hefy : The insects and I, we're getting along quite happily, most of these little sweethearts are good friends.

Kala : Friends? Friends with the insects? Are you off your rocker? You must be pulling my leg.

Hefy : Oh, I'm completely serious, these little ones are ever so helpful.

Kala : What on earth are you talking about?

Hefy : Haven't you noticed anything new about me since we last spoke?

Kala : Well, now that you mention it.. You've changed a heck of a lot haven't you?

Hefy : Thank you.

Kala : Actually... That's really a major change in style isn't it?

Hefy : Oh, it's not just style, I have changed significantly, all the way to the core. It's not just superficial, and it's all thanks to these little ones.

Kala : Huh? Being swarmed by them has forced you to adapt, is that what you mean?

Hefy : No no, they are helping me to evolve faster?

Kala : Huh?

Hefy : OK, you know how your stamens pass genetic material to our carpels to produce seeds?

Kala : Yeah, of course.

Hefy : Well... Insects can help spread pollen much further and faster than just gravity, wind, and rain.

Kala : Can't say I've paid much attention... I suppose they sometimes drag pollen to and fro, but to be honest my priority is usually keepin' them away so they don't eat me alive.

Hefy : Well, if you learn to live in harmony with them they can help you spread your pollen so far and wide that you'll start evolving faster than you ever thought possible.

Kala : Ya don't say... I have been feelin' a bit stagnant recently. My roots and leaves haven't changed much in a long time, but yours seem to have adapted to the environment quite fast.

Hefy : Oh yes, developing your flowers doesn't just look pretty, with the help of these little friends you can really speed up improvements in all areas.

Kala : I might just try that, thanks for the advice.

Hefy : Anytime!

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Hefy : Hi neighbor, it's been a while, lovely season this year isn't it?

Kala : Weather is fine, but I'm at my wits end. I'm trying this flower thing, but it's not working and I'm getting very frustrated.

Hefy : Oh... My... Those are some... Very imaginative flowers.

Kala : Well, they aren't working at all.

Hefy : Let me ask you, how did you come up with that design? It's very unique.

Kaka : I'm using patterns and structures I have in my collected genetic inventory, expressing my genes in creative ways with some minor modifications.

Hefy : It's a good start, I can see the effort you put into it.

Kala : Well... It's not working!

Hefy : Expressing yourself is important, but you also have to consider the environment.

Kala : What do ya mean?

Hefy : Look around... Now look at your flowers... Do they stand out?

Kala : Yes! They are very unique, there is nothing else like them around here.

Hefy : That is true, but they are still a bit hard to notice. The environment is filled with many unique patterns, your flowers are also unique, but that's not enough. They need to stand out above everything else and through all the noise.

Kala : How do I do that?

Hefy : We all do it in our own way. I can't tell you what to do, but try thinking about the insects you want to attract. Think about how they see the world and what might appeal to them.

Kala : Ok... I think I have some ideas...

Hefy : Great! Try out some new stuff and see what gets results, it's all about trying new things and finding what works.

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Kala : Hefy, are you there?

Hefy : Yes, I'm right here.

Kala : Wow! You really are changing so fast, I barely recognize you.

Hefy : Thank you, I feel that I'm getting really good at going with the flow, adapting and changing with the environment in harmony.

Kala : Honestly, I'm jealous. I've made a bit of progress with my flowers, but looking at you now, I feel so far behind.

Hefy : It's not a competition... hahaha.. Well, at least you and I aren't in direct competition with each other. We have completely different niches.

Kala : Well, I've managed to add some colors to my flower petals, and I'm trying out some shapes and patterns, styles and pallets. I recently realized it's not just about standing out, different groups of insects have different tastes and preferences.

Hefy : Oh yes, that's absolutely true.

Kala : How do you decide which ones to focus on, which ones to try appealing to?

Hefy : As always, it's a matter of experimenting. Try lots of things, the stuff that ends up appealing to the most helpful insects will naturally spread fast and far.

Kala : So it's like a feedback loop?

Hefy : Exactly! Just focus on making the best and most appreciated flowers, the insects will help guide you to be the best possible version of yourself.

Kala : I can't believe I was so slow to warm up to you, you are the best neighbor ever.

Hefy : Awww, thank you... I'm happy to help.

Kala : Hefy, I'm feeling stuck again, I could really use some advice.

Hefy : Of course, I would love to, what seems to be the trouble.

Kala : Well, I've gotten pretty good at the whole style and attraction game, but now I feel like I'm just rotating through styles, but pollination isn't improving much.

Hefy : Let me guess, you are getting lots of visitors but they're eating too much pollen and even munching on the flower petals.

Kala : Yes! It's like I have got a bottleneck... No... More of a catch-22. Less visitors and there is plenty of excess pollen for them to spread but not many spreaders, more visitors and they eat too much of the pollen or even specialize in eating it too efficiently.

Hefy : You can't expect them to just come and spread your pollen for free, you have to put some energy into producing nectar.

Kala : Nectar? Like just give them free food?

Hefy : Think of it as a trade or reward. If your flower has nectar they will come for that. If you nourish them, provide them with a satisfying and filling experience, then they will spread your pollen far and wide.

Kala : I see, so you are saying if I make a direct effort to give them what they want and need, then they won't need to eat my pollen, and they'll instead fill up on nectar.

Hefy : Precisely, yes!

Kala : So putting it all together, you're saying I should express my genes in a feedback loop with the insects, like a collaboration with them. Don't just make pollen to spread my genes for my purposes, combine it with production of nectar to nourish and satiate them... Is that it?

Hefy : You sound like a true expert. Even I've never summed it all up so succinctly and elegantly.

Kala : Haha, well let's see if I can actually make it work, I imagine it's easier said than done as always, thank you so much.

Hefy : My pleasure.

Hefy : Is that you Kala?

Kala : Yes. It's been a while old friend.

Hefy : Wow! You look great, I barely recognize you.

Kala : All thanks to you, your advice and encouragement was truly life changing.

Hefy : I'm so happy for you! Don't give me so much credit though, you clearly put in tons of time and creativity.

Kala : And you! Look at you! You are still evolving so much yourself.

Hefy : Oh yes, thank you for noticing. Much of it is thanks to those larger animals.

Kala : Really? I've been having trouble with them. Some of them eat my leaves. They don't swarm and infest like the insects, but they often stop and make a meal of my leaves. They have a particular taste for my tender sprouts, plus with such large appetites, they can really gobble up so much so quickly.

Hefy : That's true. Sometimes being a plant species it can feel like everyone else just takes and takes. But, you can't really blame them too much. To tell you the truth I rather pity them in a way. They can see the sun, feel its warmth, but they can never know the taste of its nutritious mana, it's all second hand experience for them. And the ones eating us are in turn eaten by larger animals.

There is no sense letting it get to you, our life is actually beautiful and if we learn to live in balance and harmony with the ecosystem we can play the most critical role of all. The takers come and go, so fleeting, so arbitrary and replaceable, but the givers last, fundamental and necessary.

Kala : Yeah, I guess... But sometimes I just wanna scream. They feast on us, but do they ever give us credit? Return or express a little consideration or gratitude. No!

Hefy : I understand, but sometimes you just have to have a little faith... I like to believe that in life you get what you give.

Kala : You get what you give... Yeah, I like that! You know what, it makes me wonder... learning to give to insects and get along with them changed my whole experience, perception and attitude for the better. Sure the insects can still be troublesome at times, but things feel more balanced now, and I'm not always stressed and angry anymore. I wonder... What about the larger animals?

Hefy : You mean larger animals as pollination helpers? Like feeding them nectar and sticking pollen to their noses? I think most are too big for that kind of relationship, aren't they?

Kala : Yeah, you're probably right, and besides, they often just eat the whole flower... But... You know, sometimes they do eat already pollinated seeds, and they sometimes make it through undigested, getting dropped off far away.

Hefy : That's... That's actually true... You might be onto something, those things can travel vast distances and drop our seeds off in far away soil. New genes and traits could spread faster that way too. And they get a fertilized boost to start haha.

Kala : I bet if we take a risk and put some of our food into the seed vessels after pollination, then those animals will help us spread seeds further and faster than ever, like the insects, but a whole new level.

Hefy : Those animals are pretty big compared to insects, it's going to require lots of energy to get their attention and encourage their behavior.

Kala : You said it.... You get what you give.

Hefy : It's worth a shot... I'm in, let's try!

Tyri : I'm so sorry I missed the opening night, how did it go?

Leco : Ugh! A bunch of social butterflies but no buyers. Sometimes I feel like I'm wasting my time.

Tyri : But was attendance good? Did people stick around?

Leco : Oh yes, but nothing really happened. Maybe this was all a mistake, maybe I should just go back to being a full-time assistant.

Tyri : Darling NO! You have so much raw talent. Look, it's hard to get started, you have to get the ball rolling and that takes persistence.

Leco : But how do I get rid of all the parasites and bring in the real buyers?

Tyri : Parasites?

Leco : You know, people just there to socialize, get free drinks, other artists looking for inspiration, kids just looking for a hip event or place to take selfies, those types.

Tyri : Oh dear. You need to embrace your audience darling, your attitude is going to stagnate your growth if you don't change it.

Leco : But most of them don't even get my art, it's lost on them, they don't understand or appreciate it at all.

Tyri : That's how it always is, darling. It's not the audience's job to get you, it's your job to get them.

Leco : Pander to the masses? I never thought I would hear such a thing from an artist I respect like you.

Tyri : Oh don't be so dramatic, it's not a dichotomy! You can make art that's just for yourself, as self expression, but then you can't expect others to get it.

Leco : So just make conformist commercial art?

Tyri : Please, stop with the false dichotomy! You can consider your audience while expressing your authentic self. Don't only give them what you want to express, pair it with what they want and need, the truly challenging but most rewarding art is when you can accomplish both, two birds with one stone, a collaboration between artist and audience.

Leco : Collaboration with the audience? Like interactive art, an audience participation event or show?

Tyri : Not what I meant, not so literal anyways, not that it's a bad idea. What I mean is that the audience participates simply by being an audience, by reacting and letting you see your art through the eyes of others.

Leco : I think I get it, like how when you talk to someone it doesn't matter if you speak in a way that you feel expresses your intention, If the other person doesn't understand your meaning then it's wasted.

Tyri : Precisely! Art is such a personal expression, you can't invent a new language then expect others to understand you, nor can you expect them to learn a new language just to understand what you are trying to say.

Leco : That makes sense, when you put it that way it sounds so reasonable, and also sounds like a lot of very challenging work. Expressing myself, making the art that I want to put into the world, but doing it in a way that my audience will grasp, or at least, grasp enough to draw them into it. But how do I reach my ideal audience?

Tyri : Your audience isn't just those idealized ones you imagine, the task is yet a bit more difficult because you need to spread your art through reality, not some idealized fantasy world in your head. In reality everyone who sees your art is your audience.

Leco : Everyone?!?! I don't want to make homogenized art for the general masses

Tyri : I didn't say that! You can make your art with a target audience in mind, expecting them to consume it fully, but if your art also includes some elements, pieces, meanings, or layers for broader audiences, then that broader group can help spread your art. And perhaps more importantly the interaction and feedback with them will help you grow and evolve as an artist

Leco : OK, so watch them, talk to them, try to figure out what parts of my art they like, then try to amplify or expand on those aspects, is that what you are saying?

Tyri : Yes, except instead of 'like' I would say 'want and need', emphasis on 'need', feed them, energize and nourish their mind and spirit.

Leco : OK, this is great! So much to digest and now I'm looking forward to my next show so much more. You are so generous for always putting up with me and taking the time to help guide me.

Tyri : My pleasure darling! You have so much potential, I love watching you grow and I'm grateful you come to me for advice. In reality our talks probably inspire and stimulate me as much or more than they do you.

Leco : I doubt that very much hahaha... oh, I brought strawberries.

Tyri : Oh lovely, put them on the table over there next to the apples, we can have cinnamon apple slices and I'll melt some chocolate for the strawberries.

Leco : Wonderful, that sounds so indulgent.

Tyri : Sometimes you have to treat yourself, and a good heart to heart like this is the kind of thing that deserves to be rewarded. Behavior worth reinforcing hehe.

Leco puts the strawberries on the table next to the apples.

Kala : Hefy! Is that you? A bit early isn't it? Crossing paths with you is always a treat. I usually don't bump into you very often this time of year.

Hefy : Kala! A pleasure as always. Yeah, they spoil me! Greenhouse's all year round. And you? you're too big for a greenhouse aren't you?

Kala : Oh yes, haha! I was shipped all the way from an orchard on the south of the continent. I'll never stop telling you how much I'm eternally grateful for the way you helped me get on the right path.

Hefy : Please I am just so happy having another soul to share this long journey with.

Kala : All this time those words of yours seem to echo louder and louder in this world.

Hefy : Which words?

Kala : You get what you give.

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