
StarTribune Editorial

Our perspective

Star flowers

Blossoms through the storm

A magnolia in Minnesota is an improbability. So it seems, at least, for the first decade of blooming. But just as a breathtaking new love becomes a common companionship, so does a frail little bush flourish into predictability. At first its spring blossoms are prayed for, then anticipated — and some years on, simply expected. A loveliness that keeps its appointments acquires an ordinariness, and sometimes we quite nearly miss the moment for rejoicing.

But who could grow used to a magnolia's white wonder? Who could take for granted that harbinger of spring — the incredible blast of bloom flying forth in defiance? That's what the magnolia does after all: It defies the ice of winter, the doggedness of the dark, the shaky likelihood of its survival. It contradicts the assumption that what we have seen is what we'll invariably get.

You remember, of course, the years when the magnolia's spring showing was no sure bet. It was a time when the ocean-colored eyes of awaited children couldn't quite be imagined — when tomorrow was one vast land of promise.

Yet somehow as dreams came true — one upon another — they seemed to lose their luster. What once shimmered like poetry came to feel like plain old prose. Spinning for a twinkling on a rock around a star, we mistook our

good fortune for entitlement. We imagined the unfathomable to be ordinary — and nearly shrugged off what we once held precious. That's how it goes in the land of plenty: People get lost in their luck, claiming yesterday's blessings as today's certainties.

Not the magnolia. The now-towering tree (could it really be 20 feet tall?) bloomed a few days ago — on a sunny afternoon when no one bothered to notice. Indeed, the miracle might have gone entirely unacclaimed but for the coming of the storm — the furious wind and the onslaught of rain. Then the fragile mass of magnolian white called out like a thousand frantic doves — fluttering in some sort of floral fear in the gale. The rage of it all should have ripped all the white from the tree, and it seemed beyond explaining that the blossoms held fast.

But so they did, most of them — even if the tree has emerged slightly winded. The magnolia, it appears, has a soil-born wisdom. It doesn't invariably expect things to go well, and doesn't take too much for granted. After a winter of ice and barrenness, it can't be devastated by a mere storm. It has the sense we too often lack — keeping in mind that some days will indeed be dark, that life's beauty is fleeting, that sustaining it entails holding tight in the worst of winds.