

A photograph of a large ship, possibly a battleship or cruiser, at sea. The ship is viewed from a distance, and the water is choppy. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The title 'THE INVISIBLE ISLAND' is overlaid on the image in a typewriter-style font, centered horizontally and split across three lines.

THE

INVISIBLE

ISLAND



THE INVISIBLE ISLAND

Written and illustrated by

SHAO NI

< Notes



26 August 2022 at 01:47

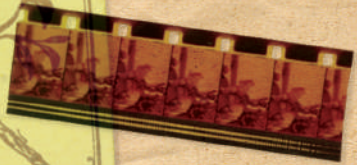
I'm now back in Taiwan.
Honestly, it feels so weird to say *back*.
It's been such a long time since I left.
I've never felt at home, not even in Japan.
I wonder what's wrong with me?

The thing is, I got a call from my mom after
breaking up with you yesterday. She told me a-
ma (That's how I call my grandma) just passed
away in her sleep. I booked a last-minute flight
and tried to take a nap.

I don't really feel sad about not being able to
say goodbye. But isn't it weird that a person
disappeared and the world is still going on as
usual?

I don't know.



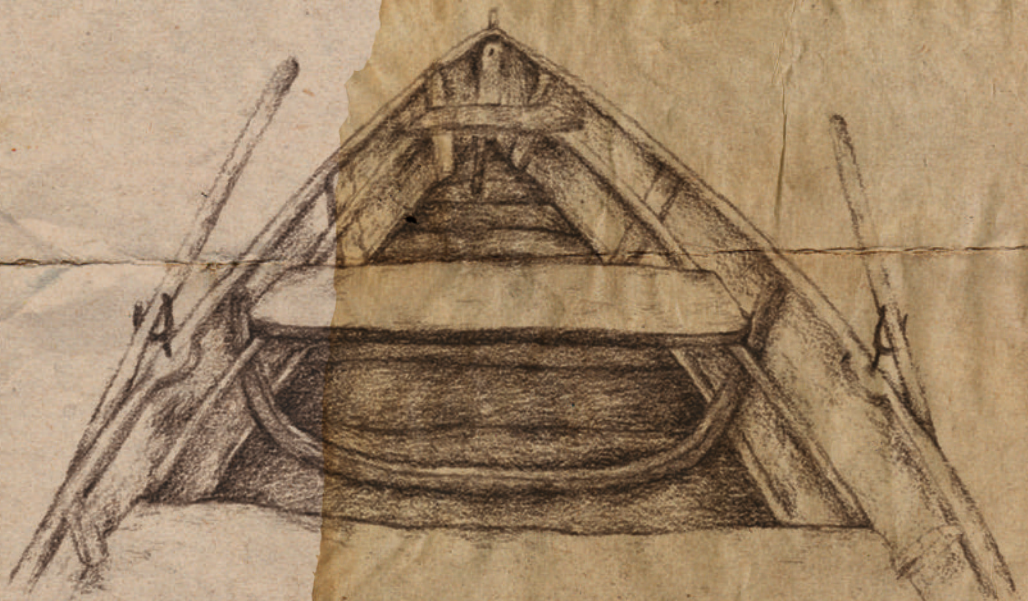


Do you believe in unicorns?





Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a list or notes, partially obscured by the drawing below.



< Notes



28 August 2022 at 04:13

I used to hide in the attic whole day, reading the books I had no means to understand. But they gave me a sense of hope. There's somewhere else I'd rather be.

I found a book called *The Secret Life of Flowers* there this afternoon (I bet you'd like it), and there's a large brown envelope in the book with a note saying this journal is very private.

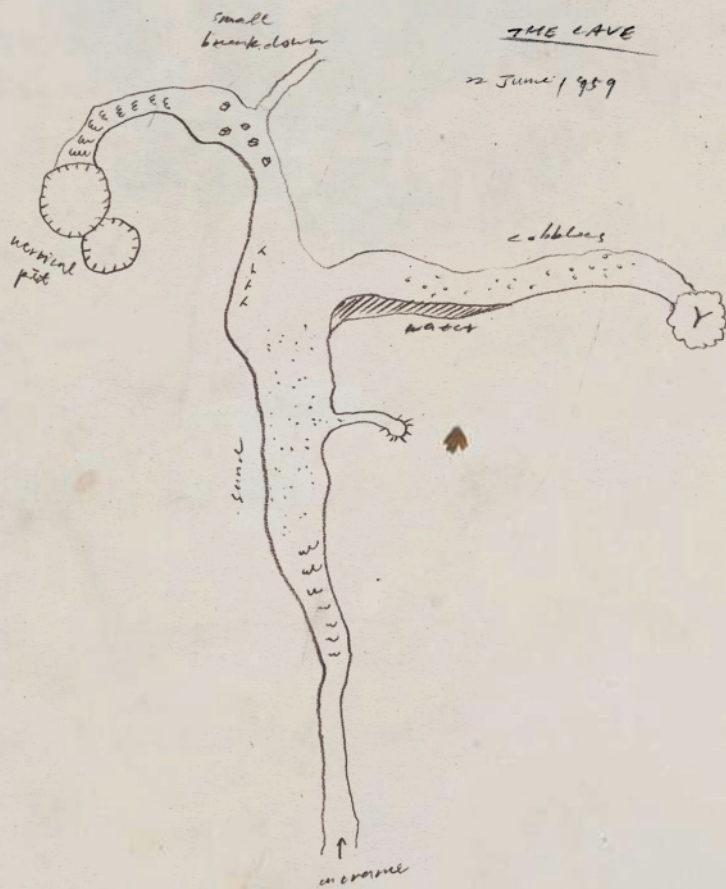
Who's *Chihiro Hibiki*?
Neither mom nor I have heard of the name.
Why did she pass her *private* journal to a-ma?

I'm hooked.



THE CAVE

→ June 1 1959





Portrait of Chihiro Hibiki



Chihiro Hibiki

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Find sources: "[Chihiro Hibiki](#)" – [news](#) · [newspapers](#) · [books](#) · [scholar](#) · [JSTOR](#) (January 2009) [\(Learn how and how to cite sources\)](#)

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Chihiro Hibiki (響 千尋, *Hibiki Chihiro*, 1926 – ?) was a Japanese [botanist](#) and botanical artist who specialized in [sequential hermaphroditism](#) in plants. She is known as the author of the 1958 book *[The Secret Life of Flowers](#)*, her only published work.

Born in Taiwan during [Japanese rule](#), Hibiki grew up in Taipei and moved to London in 1946 with her family. Losing the ability to speak after a field trip to a mysterious island in the [Pacific Ocean](#) in 1959, Hibiki went missing after being detained in a [psychiatric hospital](#) for three weeks. It's said that she sneaked into the island again by herself to find the cure, but the truth about her disease and disappearance remains a mystery since the island has been swallowed up by rising sea levels in 1987.



Genetic consequences [\[edit \]](#)

Sequential hermaphrodites almost always have a sex ratio biased towards the birth sex, and consequently experience significant changes in sex ratio after switching sexes. According to the population genetics theory, this should decrease [genetic diversity](#) and [effective population size](#). Two ecologically similar [santer sea bream](#) ([gonochoric](#)) and [slinger sea bream](#) ([protogynous](#)) in South African waters found that gonochorism was present in both the two species, and while N_e was lower in the instant for the sex-changer, they were similar over a relatively short time horizon.^[6] The ability of organisms to change biological sex has allowed for better reproductive success based on the ability for certain genes to pass down to generation. The change in sex also allows for organisms to reproduce if no individuals of the opposite sex are already present.

Botany [\[edit \]](#)

Sequential hermaphroditism in plants is the process in which a plant changes its sex throughout its lifetime. Sequential hermaphroditism in plants is very rare. There are less than 0.1% of recorded cases in which plant species entirely change their sex.^[62] The Patchy Environment Model and Size Dependent Sex Allocation are the two environmental factors which drive sequential hermaphroditism in plants. The Patchy Environment Model states that plants will want to maximize the use of their resources through the change of their sex. For example, if a plant will benefit more from the resources of a given environment in a certain sex, it will want to change to that sex. Furthermore, Size Dependent Sex Allocation outlines that in sequential hermaphroditic plants, it is preferable to change sexes in a way that maximizes their overall fitness compared to their size over time.^[63] Similar to maximizing the use of resources, if the combination of size and fitness for a certain sex is more beneficial, the plant will want to change to that sex. Evolutionarily, sequential [hermaphrodites](#) emerged as certain species found that one of the best ways to maximize the benefits of their environment was through changing their sex.





17 June 1959

What makes plants such magnificent living things is that they eat, breathe and grow just like humans, yet they always live rooted to one place. Only when I'm deeply immersed in the rhythm of flowers do I connect to my roots. Those transient moments have been my soil, water and sunshine since I left Formosa—the beautiful island.

At this moment in time, I'm on an obscure island that has no name, accompanied by untamed birds chirping, fleeting clouds floating and a profusion of radiant flowers. I've been feeling as if I've been waiting for something without knowing what I'm waiting for since we landed. A rare species of flower? I'm perfectly content with my life as an anonymous rover sketching flowers before the light fades—even the ubiquitous type of wildflowers make me delighted beyond expression. And every day I wish your eyes could be in place of mine...



23 June 1959

I don't recall how I got back to my tent yesterday.

It was a typical morning. I woke up at 5 o'clock as usual, setting out for a walk after having my steaming cup of mint tea. The air was refreshing before the sun came up. For some reason, I decided to go further when reaching the river.

I turned sharp right to a narrow path through the mountains which remained untouched. Walking through a jungle of massive trees, I was surrounded by small beams of rose and gold light filtered through the thick canopy of leaves. I got so wrapped up in the sense of tranquillity that I didn't realize how far I had gone until I found myself standing in front of a rocky cavern.

I readily headed down into the dark and found it weirdly warm inside.

As my eyes adapted to the darkness, I felt like floating in space surrounded by a sea of velvety stars. I swam through the trail like a train speeding towards the light at the end of the tunnel, before I reached an expansive dome. I noticed a sweet perfume wafting through the air and that there's something in the gleaming light. It was a unicorn with translucent, silky white coat which shimmered like *Diphyllia grayi* petals in the rain. I stood transfixed by the magnificent being when our eyes met... I wish I could reach somewhere beyond the words to describe it, whilst silence speaks more than any words.







< Notes



29 August 2022 at 22:26

Do you believe in unicorns?

You know I always go thumbing through the books in *Tsutaya* whenever I'm adrift. If I'm in luck, I'll meet someone who can articulate my thoughts into words. Usually the person died long ago, yet the words can still get through time and space, coming to me. It feels like finally finding the thing you've been looking for so long that you even forgot what it is.

The point is, I had the same feeling when reading the journal today.



25 June 1959

I asked the guide if he believes in unicorns. He gave a chuckle and told me to stop rambling as we needed to set off in an hour.

There's something nuanced like a budding flower within me and a wave of sorrow is washing over me. It happened once before when I stared at the nape of your snowy neck turning magenta in the glow of sunset back on your bike. For a moment I thought I saw eternity. But does something beautiful and permanent exist in the world?



Does

something

beautiful

and

permanent



exist

in

the

world





Name of Patient. Chihiro Hibiki	Gender. Female	Age. 33
Admitted. Jul. 19, 1959	Reg. No. II70	Case Book No. 002I486
Occupation. Botanist	Previous Place of Abode. 39 Moslyn Road, Brixton	

Discharged.	Left the Hospital. Aug. 9, 1959	Died.
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Patient is very depressed and confused. Rather tall woman with dark brown hair. Rather thin. She will do as requested, but will not speak a single word - She replies by nodding or shaking her head. Fairly tidy in her dress.

Jul. 22 - Visited by Mr Timothy for purposes of making reception orders. Will not speak - communicates her wants by writing.

Jul. 24 - Patient slept seven hours last night without draught.

Jul. 25 - Patient still maintains complete silence.

Jul. 28 - Patient was walking in the garden alone and with head bent forward as though brooding. She refused to speak when addressed - She takes food well.

Jul. 29 - Still sits absolutely apart, refuses to and maintains attitude of grief with face buried hands. Looks stouter - Sleeps and eats well.

Jul. 30 - About the same as last note - Sleeps on average 7 hours (no draught). Sample of patients I release her. Do you believe in unicorns? Do you

Jul. 31 - Complaining of pain in head.

Aug. 2 - Patient's general health is good and she gaining flesh. She still holds entirely aloof and with face buried in her hands and refuses to speak

Aug. 3 - Yesterday was removed (from I. A.) to In No. 2 - Had very little sleep - groaned audibly m the night - Still refuses to speak.

Aug. 9 - Patient left the hospital uncured (special reasons).



24 July 1959

8.30 a.m. Breakfast

10.0 a.m. Exercise

10.30 a.m. O.T. hut

12.15 p.m. Remedial exercise

1.15 p.m. Lunch

3.30 p.m. Afternoon tea

4.0 p.m. 'Free' time

7.0 p.m. Dinner

10.0 p.m. Go to bed

Initially, life here seemed no different from that of living in a comfortable hotel.

At the moment I'm doing whatever is necessary but without any amusement except when I can steal an hour or two of silence to write or draw in the garden with those irritating golf pencils.

I'm aware that Ophelia always stays on the verandah overlooking the garden when I'm sketching. Tho' she's silent like me, she sings snatches of songs in a low voice every night (that's where her name comes from). I wonder if she's ever seen me as she seems restless and agitated with a faraway look in her eyes all the time.

< Notes



1 September 2022 at 00:42

Today is the seventh day. Mom told me to stay in my room after dark or I'd disturb the returning soul of the dead.

I slipped into a-ma's room but nothing happened. I feel dumb to be disappointed. Still, I'm disappointed cos I realise I've never really known my grandma and the other way around. I've got so many questions to ask. What happened between you and Hibiki? Are you there trying to say something to me through this? Something deeply hidden in the dark for decades?

I stared at the blue light from the bug zapper, haunted by the memory of those humid summer nights when everyone was asleep except me. I would toss and turn on the bamboo mat like a stuck mosquito, wondering how many nights were left until I could become a grown-up.





A



B



C



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E



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Y



Z

PLAYING FROM PLAYLIST

mOod



A Soulmate Who Wasn't Meant to Be

Jess Benko

0:17 ————— -2:03



📶 Devices Available

27 July 1959

The doctor asked me if I remembered the very last thing I said.

"Do you believe in unicorns?" I wrote. Not surprisingly, he answered my question with another one asking "What have you dreamt about recently?" As I can barely sleep with people bursting out at night, I jotted down the recurring dream I had for evermore before arriving here.

It's a bright summer afternoon. I'm standing on the street we walked by together time after time. Tsuruya Wagashi, Nakamura Clinic, Matsui Wafuku... All the stores are open yet there's no one but me. "Is anyone there?" I whisper. I head towards the harbour at the end of the road but it seems to get further and further away from me. I speak your name in silence and I feel a sudden chill in the air. I then see flaky snow falling like cherry blossom petals out of the blue. In a trice, the whole Gijuu town is covered with emptiness. My steps get quicker and shorter until the sunset falls on the snow like a burning fire. At a far distance, there's a silhouette of a person over the horizon, marching to the sea. It's you. It's you dressed in my white kimono. I try desperately to call you but feel like something is choking in my throat...

I never fail to wake up at that same moment without knowing where you are going, pining for the pink in your cheeks, the tender smile on your face and the sweet taste of the kamaboko we had together.







< Notes



3 September 2022 at 03:18

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and had the feeling that you can never feel anything anymore? It feels like I've ripped the heart out of myself and there's nothing left inside.

As I was scrolling on my phone it occurred to me that mostly I took photos of you from behind. I guess it puts my mind at rest to know that the people I cherish are always in sight.



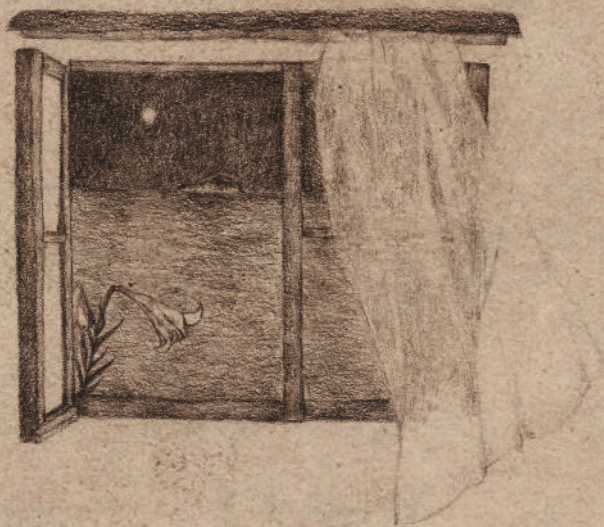
2 August 1959

I took a peek at the isolation room from the door hole this morning. The thought of watching myself living a mundane and repetitive life frightened me when I saw nothing but the word "emptiness" scratched out with someone's nails on the wall.

It reminds me of how gloomy and hopeless I felt the first time I went to the British Museum. There was a tiny pebble sculpture of embracing lovers sitting face to face. Is that eternity? I heard their souls moaning. I was sorrowful not only because they are from somewhere thousands of miles away but the way they are classified, labelled and isolated in a glass box, just like any other objects on display. If they hadn't been found, they could have stayed in the small cave out of nowhere and returned to the ground together.

I long for my life and my soul back.







11 August 1959

A few hours later I will see the Victoria Dock getting smaller and smaller, lights dimmer and dimmer one last time. I have nothing to lose. These words are the one and only thing I can leave you. I shall be back to my motherland when you read this line.

I met you for a reason. I met you since I know you believe in unicorns.

The time we spent together has been the essence of my life even tho' it's just two years. Time is an illusion we create to make ourselves believe life isn't one.

Imagine our lives to be two rivers stretching out ahead of us.

And they will, one day, meet somewhere again in the deep blue ocean.

< Notes



6 September 2022 at 21:55

For the very last time, I saw a-ma with the most tender smile. I put a dried white flower found in the journal in her hands. Isn't it mind-blowing that the fragile thing survives through time? Even the colours remain pure and bright.

I walked to the seaside after the funeral, worn out but relieved as if a part of me was also burnt into ashes. Thousands of questions popped into my head when cars and joggers were passing by me from behind. Where's everyone going? Where do people go when they die? What are we chasing? But I'm a stroller, not a runner. That's the only thing I know.

Staring at shades of blue colours that no words can describe, I felt nothing but humility. At that instant, I realised all the oceans are connected to each other. I whispered your name to the waves, picturing you standing on the other side of the water, in my white kimono.









"Do not go gentle into that good night."

University of Brighton
Sequential Design/Illustration MA

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