

## ESSAY

# Where Have the Flowers Gone?

By Catherine Li

Every summer when the moon shines above on a clear night, I look forward to seeing the blossoms of the stephanotis cascading down the tall tree fern. It is then the moon's ethereal beauty casts a magical spell on the star like blossoms transforming them into even more startling pristine whites. At the same time, the spores of the fern cover everything in sight with a brown film thicker than dust. At any moment, the dry fronds of the fern far above may turn into tinder.

During the day while sweeping the ground, I consider having the fern removed from my small garden. Since it's a shame to kill otherwise such a majestic specimen, I try to look for a home for it among my neighbors and friends. But, no one wants an oversized, dirty fern.

When the small blossoms peek out between emerald green leaves on the trunk of the fern, I relent and regret how such an idea could possibly have crossed my mind. Without the fern, the vine would have nothing to cling onto. Planted side by side in the ground, the vine and fern have a symbiotic relationship. While the fern provides the vine with shade and support, the vine encircling the fern covers the dark and gangly trunk.

This year, the blossoms are even more beautiful and plentiful. Seeing these small blossoms, they evoke the ones on my late husband's lapel on our wedding day. They are also little stephanotis blossoms that nestled against his black tuxedo.

Although my late husband, Herbert, was short in stature, his shoulders were broad, and so I could easily lean and count on him. His feet were always firmly planted on the ground so that when his dreams and mine became one, they were always grounded in reality.

We were young then, green in our love that was still untried, but our love was as pristine as the white blossoms on his lapel. On that wedding day, we promised to love and honor one another until the end of time. Through the years, we were tested, adjusted to each other's weaknesses and strengths, and clung onto one another so that we entwined to become one. The milk and honey from our love gave us nourishment and sustenance to resolve our differences and together face the outside world.

Many winters and summers had come and go since we parted in the light of day. At first, he would visit me in my dreams offering comfort and solace. However, as the sand of time slowly shifted, his visits became fewer and further in between. And his voice only echoed faintly in my mind.

Today as I gaze at the blossoms, I think to myself how lucky I was that once I had Herbert's strength to shelter and support me. And now that same strength has taken root in my heart becoming a part of me to anchor and carry me through good times and troubled ones.

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