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## Failed Gram Stain

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**B**y the time I was 9, my mother had finally found love. My step-dad, a man much older than her, talked her into a Hawaiian wedding. I've never gotten to know a flower so well as the Hibiscus at that time. Hibiscus symbolized an ideal wife or a perfect love. There were many hibiscus plants and decorations around the island, but my mother wore tuberose around her neck the night she got married.

When I was 11, my favorite flower was the cherry blossom. A symbol of beauty, youth, and the fleetingness of life as one knows it. A reminder to live life to the fullest and never take anything for granted. I remember sitting on the floor of my house in North Dallas, a house that had been standing since the 1950's, and doodling little cherry blossoms onto crisp white printer paper hastily and with a tiny bit of urgency. My best friend and mentor at the time had asked me to, and despite my laziness, I filled 3 whole pages with badly-scribbled cherry blossoms.

When I gave them to her, she said she wanted a darker shade of pink. I was quick to darken them.

By the time I was 12, I had long stopped picking flowers in the literal sense. My favorite flower had become a Paulownia. Paulownias grew on trees and were planted as a custom in Southeast Asia when a baby girl in a noble family was born. In other words, it symbolized new life. At 12, I no longer had a best friend. My days were spent listening to music and drawing. My worst and only companion was myself, but the growing discomfort inside me only paved the way for more creativity. I remember writing a poem about paulownias, but it got lost later when I moved. I never looked for it even after I unpacked.

**A**t 13 my favorite flower was the red rose. Typical, but quintessential, the red rose symbolized love, passion and commitment. I would buy roses to keep in the house often, in a vase on the kitchen table. I'd occasionally pull one out and grip it in my hands to check and see if it had thorns. I remember how even when they did have thorns, I'd close my fist around the stem again and squeeze. My step-father would bring my mother roses often as well, but she began to hate it when he did. Eventually, I kept the roses I bought in my room and out of the kitchen where I had staged them before. I stayed in my room more often, anyway.

At 14, violets were my flower of choice. They symbolized devotion and purity, despite their deep, almost hedonistic purple tone. The color of a violet is so rich, and yet the flower itself stands for modesty and commitment. I was 14 when I was first in love with someone. I got my heart broken, and along with that, a tiny piece of me was lost that I wasn't even ever aware I had.



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