

These Flowers Must Bloom  
by Logan Spurgeon

1

In the dark of the greenhouse, under the light of a milky moon and the glow of a candlestick, I wait patiently to see if my orchid will bud. I have grown ~~a~~ many good things in my garden, triumphant daffodils and two-faced pansies, tilted sunflowers and malevolent snapdragons, but I've never been able to grow a white frog orchid. It is the one thing ~~still that~~ ~~evades~~ ~~evading~~ me in this life.

\_\_\_\_\_ He promised me that everything would grow in my garden.

The humidity in the glass enclosures fogs my glasses and I pull them off to ~~give them a good~~ ~~cleaning~~ ~~them~~ with the hem of my shirt. When I put them back on, I see a shadow out of the corner of my eye. I follow it ~~with my gaze~~ until it disappears like ~~a~~ fog across the lawn. It must be late and I must be tired.

I take another look at my prized possession, examining the roots that extend into the fresh, warm dirt. I whisper to it, telling it my secrets, and ~~let it give me back life~~ ~~feel it giving life back to me~~. We are in symbiosis, the perfect pairing. I put ~~my~~ away my pruning shears and ~~the~~ trowel, ~~I~~ ~~ignoring~~ the shovel in the corner. I'll put it away another day.

When I turn to leave, I see ~~a~~ the shadow again ~~before me~~. ~~It stands before me but~~ I do not flinch. I examine it. ~~It is the specter of a man I once knew~~. ~~It is~~ a breeze passing through the veil, an infestation from the netherworld come to destroy my garden. ~~It is the figure of a man I once knew~~. The filtered glass of the greenhouse shakes in the lukewarm wind and pulls my attention away. The shadow flees, and I, in exhaustion and weariness, go to my bed.

**Commented [1]:**

You use "the shadow" a lot throughout, so I've changed several instances to make it both more personal (saying "his shadow") and varied.

2

It has been a few days since I last saw ~~the shadow~~ ~~him~~, ~~the ghost~~. I tucked it away at the ~~end~~ ~~back~~ of my mind, a solitary place where I leave the most horrible things to be forgotten by time. I rarely visit. ~~T~~\_\_\_\_\_ There are far too many things to tend to in ~~the~~ ~~my~~ garden. ~~My~~ ~~The~~ peppers ~~have~~ ~~are~~ flourishing ~~ing~~ nicely, ~~and~~ ~~are~~ like tiny red and green ornaments hanging from the vine. I need to collect and dry the sunflower seeds before the birds get to them or they fall to the ground, but I want to check on my orchid first.

The little bud has grown rather quickly. Its stalk now stretches up towards the sun. Soon it will bloom. I can feel it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can feel him. I take a moment and carefully, slowly turn my head. ~~I see~~ ~~t~~ The shadow ~~is~~ in the doorway, preventing me from passing through. I don't scream or run. I watch and I wait.

Eventually he walks towards me, arms out, and vanishes into ~~the~~ ~~a~~ air, like dust moving through ~~the~~ rays of sun. I pocket my shears. I don't know if you can injure a ~~shadow~~ ~~ghost~~, but having them ~~on me~~ makes me feel safer. I walk out of the greenhouse, lock the door, and quickly return to ~~my~~ ~~the~~ house.

I take a warm shower ~~and~~ ~~to~~ wash away the dirt, ~~I~~ ~~digging~~ ~~into~~ ~~my~~ ~~at~~ the mud under my fingernails, ~~scraping~~ ~~out~~ the hardened mud until I make them bleed. I bow my head and let the water pour over me. The tub struggles to drain, and for a moment I'm standing in a puddle. I think of the shadow, the dirt, ~~the~~ ~~my~~ orchid, and all my dreams under the roof of the greenhouse. I turn off the water and dry off.

It's almost midnight. I hear the grandfather clock groan as it prepares to move its heavy hands and announce the hour. I was dreaming just moments ago, a dream of the greenhouse set ablaze and my orchid devoured by flames until it was ash. I get up from my bed to wander out into the night.

The moon billows brighter, as if to mock my little candle. The wax spills a bit as I walk over the rough pathway. I pass the small stone figurines that litter the yard. They were gifts from the man I once loved. A small faun hides behind the bushes, an overturned hand holds a silkworm in its palm, and the miniature statue of two lovers embracing has been stained and is broken down the middle. They were gifts from the man I once loved.

The years are all I have left of him. I should break the statues down, chip them to pieces, and scatter the remains in the fresh-turned dirt. He promised me—and he broke his promise. Now, maybe he would fulfill it. I hold the flickering candle in my right hand while I unlatch the door to the greenhouse. It's warm inside, the glass fogged from the humidity, and it takes me a moment to adjust.

I check the orchid, it's almost timeready to bloom. I can see the petals of the plants eager to emerge, tendrils ready to touch the sky. I set my candle down on the oak table and speak gently to the white frog orchid. It knows my secrets now and has no reason to keep its mouth shut. I pull out a stool and sit down. I wait.

**Commented [2]:**

Something I've noticed in several of your stories is the way you describe the moon, and it's often in similar ways. (Also usually kind of negative—what did the moon do to you?! Haha) Might be worth keeping an eye on to avoid being repetitive, unless it's an intentional thing.

**Commented [3]:**

Love the references!

**Commented [4]:**

Deleting because it's confusing, feel free to disagree!

I've been here in the warmth of the greenhouse for hours, in the middle of the night, but he hasn't shown himself. I start to question if I had imagined the shadow, dreamt it into existence, pulled the scattered threads back into a threadbare tapestry of memory—but it wasn't this isn't something my mind would create. I've never been one for walking nightmares. I can't conjure up spirits to let them speak once more; I'm no medium and this is no seance.

I pick up the candle, say whisper goodnight to my prized orchid, and push the stool back under the table. I turn to leave, but something pushes shoves me from behind. I catch myself on the table and spill some wax on my hand. It briefly burns stings as I look around over my shoulder. The shadow ghost is there, towering above me just like he did when he was alive. He pushes slaps me to the ground. I hit my head hard and can feel the trickle of blood matting my hair.

The candle rolls across the floor, extinguished from its fall. I slowly rise slowly, pulling myself up by the stool. I'm cautious, on edge, searching for the his dark figure. He can't be back here. I grab touch the back of my head to make sure it's real. The blood eovers on my hands glistens in the moonlight. I notice the that my orchid has fallen over, dirt has been spilled, and the poor creature darling looks wounded. I set it up-right and scoop the precious earth back into the pot. The orchid plant appears undamaged. I gently comfort the her.

There are no more signs of the shadow him. No shifts in the light, no presence watching me from the corners of the greenhouse, no touch of a dark hand upon my body. I sigh in relief. I leave the greenhouse, hurry across the damp lawn, climb the steps to my back porch, and lock myself in the comfort safety of my home. I never want to see him again.

**Commented [5]:**

Editing because this is a key moment and the words need a little more oomph to them.

**Commented [6]:**

I'd love to see you dig deeper into the emotions shown here. The MC just experienced a violent attack from the ghost of their dead (abusive) husband—I feel like they'd be more than cautious and on edge.

**Commented [7]:**

Choosing to anthropomorphize a bit here and use "her" instead of it. They love the plant enough for it to fit.

The next morning, I'm ~~hesitant~~ ~~don't want~~ to go back to the greenhouse. I slide into my overalls and button them up, ~~checking if~~ my shears are still in my pocket. ~~I need to check on my orchid.~~ I've dreamt of growing the rare ~~beauty~~orchid ever since I saw one at a conservatory in the city. They're ~~an~~ endangered ~~species~~ and incredibly difficult to cultivate. Few survive outside of perfect conditions in the wild—~~and~~ I've grown one. I won't let him ruin this for me.

The sun dimly beams through a heavy curtain of clouds. It looks like it will rain at any moment. I walk to the greenhouse and peer through the glass. ~~The~~His shadow is there, standing over my orchid. I hit the glass hard. The walls rumble like the thunder above. I run inside and ~~see he's there.~~ A ~~a~~ ghostly dark hand ~~touching~~ the fragile leaves of my precious white ~~plant~~flower. I scream at him, but he does not flinch.

Something strange is happening. ~~it's like he's—his shadowy figure is~~ coming into focus. He looks at the orchid ~~as~~and it begins to bloom. I see it unfold slowly, like it's unwrapping, removing the shroud and revealing itself. The ~~shadow~~specter is doing the same. His features are emerging from the shade as the darkness lifts from him like a flower blooming. ~~He becomes real as a heavy rain begins to fall.~~

—I ~~remember~~feel myself drop into the memory of what I did as he reaches for me. He wraps his hands around my throat. They're almost ~~real~~solid, but his body flickers like a flame. I grab his fingers and peel them off my neck. He ~~tries~~lunges to grab me ~~with his other hand~~again, but ~~this hand~~ passes through me. I feel his fingers swipe through my stomach and ~~I throw up in my mouth~~a wave of nausea rolls over me, but I'm free from him.

He looks at his hand as grey flesh begins to appear. He checks his body, touches his face, and looks at the orchid. The white frog flower is unfolding, twisting out from its cloister, and spreading ~~its petals~~. He ~~does~~is doing the same, ~~he~~beings from the other side, ~~stepping~~s out from the shadow, ~~and~~. ~~He~~ becomes a man again ~~as a heavy rain begins to fall.~~ ~~Then~~I know what I must do.

Commented [8]:  
Changing because this is gross and feels too strange haha

The rain splashes and scatters on the roof of the greenhouse. ~~I feel that~~†The veil ~~is~~feels thin here, a joint between worlds ready to slip and snap. I have to keep him from crossing over, to keep him from taking ~~hold~~root here. He does not belong here. ~~I see him and I see the orchid. The two cannot live here. This should've never happened.~~

I see ~~him come to life~~, his heart beats through translucent skin, ~~this~~ blood vessels worming through his flesh, ~~and his neck begins to turn a lukewarm color.~~ He lunges for me and slams into my body. It feels like part of him moves through me, but ~~other~~the rest is too real and can't pass. ~~I've never felt anything like it.~~

He ~~shudd~~ters and stumbles back. I slip the shears out of my pocket and hold them tight ~~and ready.~~ He looks at me with opaque eyes. ~~In a second, and~~ I see the artery in his neck turn ~~red~~full and ~~blue~~ under his unstable flesh. ~~I took them and jabbed them~~plunge my garden shears through his throat, slicing the ~~vein~~carotid. ~~and see a red vapor pour forth.~~ When I ~~pull~~ jerk the shears out ~~of his flesh, a red vapor gushes forth.~~ The image of the man I once knew begins to fade back into ~~a shadow,~~ but he's still trying to hold on, to stay on this side. He doesn't belong here.

Commented [9]:  
Feel free to change back, I liked the plant metaphor haha

Commented [10]:  
After "he becomes a man again" this feels redundant.

Commented [11]:  
If his vein is sort of reforming, it would be blue/purple/green, not red.

I turn to ~~them~~ white frog orchid. The flower is in full bloom, but it's radiating a strange darkness. ~~I don't want to do this, but~~My heart breaks when I realize they ~~are're~~ connected. ~~I never should have tried this,~~I never should have grown my prized possession under these conditions. ~~With shaking hands,~~ I ~~take~~use the ~~bloody~~ shears ~~and~~to cut the ~~stem of the flower~~flower's stem. The ~~white~~ orchid bloom falls on the table and the darkness ~~stops flowing~~fades. The shadow of my husband ~~fades~~dissolves into the night. I stand alone in the greenhouse as the ~~one~~ thing I loved the most withers.

7

Despite the cold, the sun burns warm against my skin as I stand in the garden. The greenhouse has been disassembled and is being carried off by the movers. It's the only thing from the yard that I'm bringing with me. The statues can stay here. All the other plants I had have died off from the frost that came just after the rain. That was almost two months ago.

I drink my cup of tea and look at ~~the~~ spot where the greenhouse once stood. The fresh earth around it still remains; the grass has tried to encroach the land but has only frayed the edges. It can't go any further, ~~it's~~ afraid of what lies beneath. Once, I considered salting the earth, ~~but~~ then nothing would grow out of the darkness. He did promise me that everything would grow in my garden, ~~but~~ I don't think he believed ~~that~~it would include his ghost. ~~I suppose everything planted in the damp earth will come forth in time. These flowers must bloom.~~

I walk out to the patch of dirt and stand where the doorway once was. ~~I,~~ bending down and touching the ground, feeling the grit on my hand. ~~I whisper to the ground and it keeps my secret, just like the orchid.~~ I still feel pain in my heart when I think of what I did. I had all that I wanted in the palm of my hand and I had to crush it. Maybe some secrets should stay buried.

The movers finish their haul and tell me they're heading out. I should leave too. I have new things to do, ~~new things to grow.~~ My life is before me and he is behind me. I caress the ground and tell him goodbye. His bones say nothing. As they should. ~~The ground is cursed, the soil haunted by his presence. It wasn't wise to use it to grow my precious orchid. Maybe some flowers shouldn't bloom. I leave this place ready for new seasons and new growth.~~

Commented [12]:  
So good!

Commented [13]:  
Does it feel a little unfinished here with the orchid? Is the MC going to try growing it again in a new place?

Commented [14]:  
Deleting because it felt like an anticlimactic ending after some of the great lines in this final part. If you'd like to keep them, I'd suggest moving them up or reworking so they feel better as closing lines.