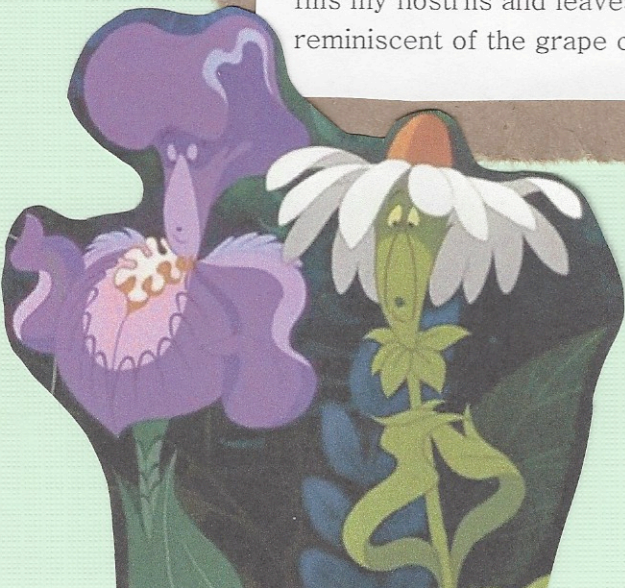


Wisteria at Golden Hour

I soak in the sun's last embrace as it begins its descent westward into the distant blue mountaintops. It's warm light spreads out in golden rays, illuminating the blades of grass into a golden yellow. I look behind me to see the flowers in full bloom—Nana tells me they're *wisteria*. My eyes scan the massive growth, which must have crawled slowly up the white pillar in my grandparents' yard bit by bit until resting atop the arbor. It fills the air with a sweet perfume. I inhale a deep breath.

Upon closer inspection of the flowers, I'm reminded of the singing garden from Alice in Wonderland. Each flower has a pale purple hat shaped like a spade. There's a hint of yellow at the base's center, which is met by a royal budded mouth. I move closer to inspect the delicate purple flowers and take in their fragrance once more as they dance in the evening breeze. The sickly sweet scent fills my nostrils and leaves a phantom taste on my tongue. It's reminiscent of the grape cough syrup from my childhood.



A wave of peace flows through me, as if a heavy sigh escaped from my soul. I marvel at the calm. It's almost as though someone forgot to tell nature what's happening. *Didn't someone tell the sun not to shine, for the birds to stop singing?* It seems impossible that the human world could be in such a state of disarray, yet still nature continues its course.

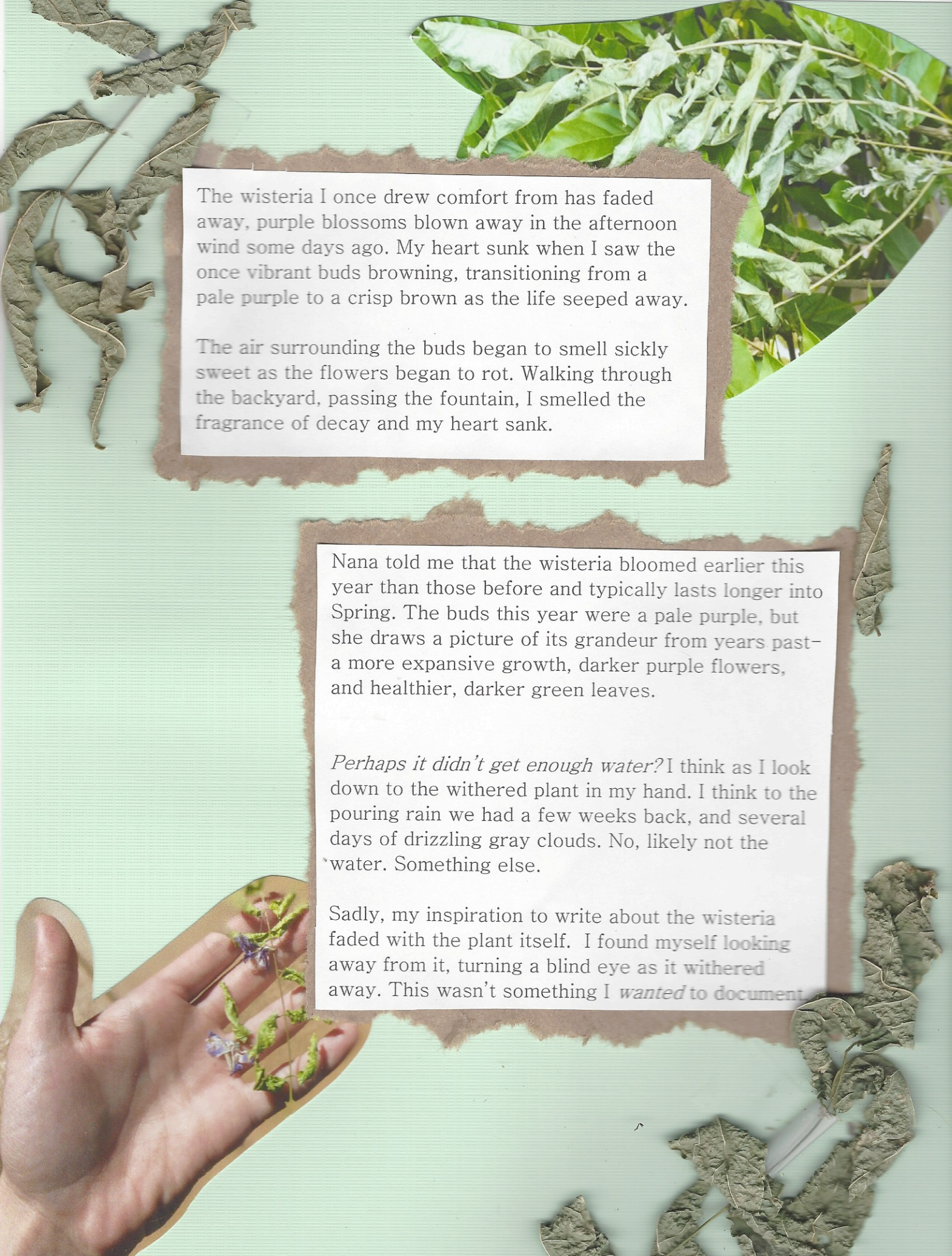
There's a unique perspective that nature provides, a reminder that life continues forward. The trials of today may seem many, but there's greater life just around the corner—*this too shall pass*.

All at once, the light falls behind the gumdrop tree as the sun slips behind the mountains. The cold instantly sinks into my bones, and I make my way inside the house feeling calmer and lighter.

I choose a spot on the steps beside the wisteria and listen. Bees swarm the plant and fill my ears with humming. Occasionally, I catch the distinct whirring of hummingbird wings above my head. Crickets chirp in the grass, and somewhere in the distance a neighbor's dog barks. On the side of the house, I hear droplets fall from the bib and soak into the Earth. Birds converse in different melodies as one vocalist tries to outperform the rest. There's always one in the chorus who tries to take the spotlight, it seems nature is no exception.

I welcome the warmth of the sun on my cheek as a light breeze dances across my skin and leaves light goosebumps in its wake. As I listen to the orchestra playing before me, I'm reminded of the passage of the lilies of the field and ponder its verses. *The songbirds above me and the wisteria before me are taken care of, will I not be alright too?*

This too shall pass



The wisteria I once drew comfort from has faded away, purple blossoms blown away in the afternoon wind some days ago. My heart sunk when I saw the once vibrant buds browning, transitioning from a pale purple to a crisp brown as the life seeped away.

The air surrounding the buds began to smell sickly sweet as the flowers began to rot. Walking through the backyard, passing the fountain, I smelled the fragrance of decay and my heart sank.

Nana told me that the wisteria bloomed earlier this year than those before and typically lasts longer into Spring. The buds this year were a pale purple, but she draws a picture of its grandeur from years past—a more expansive growth, darker purple flowers, and healthier, darker green leaves.

Perhaps it didn't get enough water? I think as I look down to the withered plant in my hand. I think to the pouring rain we had a few weeks back, and several days of drizzling gray clouds. No, likely not the water. Something else.

Sadly, my inspiration to write about the wisteria faded with the plant itself. I found myself looking away from it, turning a blind eye as it withered away. This wasn't something I *wanted* to document.

Again, the resiliency of nature reveals itself.

While the blooms are long gone, the evidence of their stay is prevalent. I see the dead stems they once hung onto, brittle and decrepit. A few stray petals are stuck to the ground, reminiscent of a time when the wisteria was in full-bloom. But, something surprising has happened.

The surrounding leaves have darkened, grown in the spaces the blossoms once occupied. The leaves that were once a golden yellow have matured to a healthier green. Perhaps in shedding the blossoms, beautiful as they were, the plant as a whole was allowed to grow in a way I never expected.

I think about how often that occurs—something precious and beautiful crumbles. We mourn as something once healthy is subject to decay and begin to remember the times of flourishing and prosperity. But, if we let it, loss is an opportunity for further growth. The decay sheds, and by bit, growth occurs in the vacated spaces.



"Look at the birds
of the air; they neither
sow nor reap nor gather
into barns, yet your
heavenly Father feeds
them. Are you not of?
more value than they?"

Witnessing the wisteria's change, I am reminded of a concept called "post-traumatic growth"; when individuals who have experienced trauma or hardship grow as a result of those challenges, sometimes in ways that allow them to grow beyond where they were before the trauma was experienced. This is the beauty of transformation, the resilience of the human spirit, and the goodness that can come from any situation. Post-traumatic growth is a reminder that we not only can survive but thrive, despite and in spite of circumstance.

*wistful
wisteria*

Now I look at the wisteria with new eyes. I see the darkening of the leaves, the overall health of the plant improving as it sheds the parts that have deadened. I feel a little guilty for turning a blind eye as my favorite plant changed. I didn't recognize it for what it was – the wisteria's transformation rather than its demise. I feel a new responsibility to be a witness to the changes it endures.



rainy day ponderings

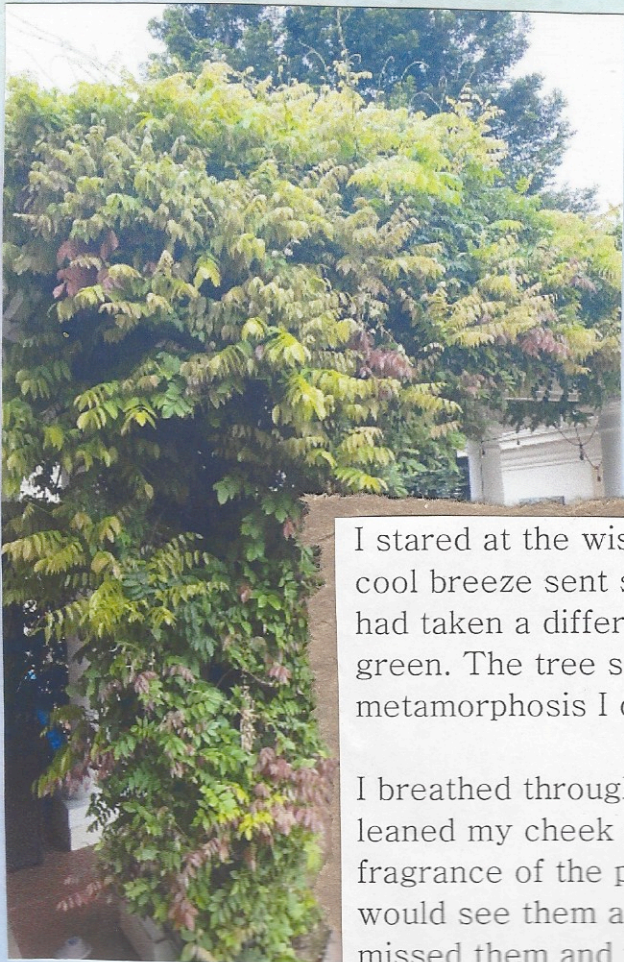


I sat outside on the concrete steps, tears of frustration stinging in my eyes as I mourned with nature. I felt heavy like the darkened clouds, as unsettled as the wild wind, and my tears threatening to overflow like the rain from the clouds overhead.

Today I was left with more uncertainty about what the next months hold. The excitement I had felt for summer, for senior year had turned to an overwhelming ache. The excitement I felt for my future was replaced with anxiety and fear, as I felt my hopes and dreams slipping through my fingertips.

I stare at the grey clouds, the gloominess outside reflecting the turmoil I feel within. I'm glad it's not a sunny day—it would seem too cheerful. Today I just want to acknowledge what I'm feeling, and to know that being sad is okay.

Today the hope I had for life to get back to normal deflated and I lost the thing I had held so tightly to. A thread in the sweater had been pulled, and I felt my emotions unraveling from where they were usually tightly coiled and organized.




I stared at the wisteria tree, shuddering as a strong, cool breeze sent shivers down my spine. The leaves had taken a different hue; browning purple and yellow-green. The tree seemed to be undergoing a metamorphosis I didn't quite understand.

I breathed through my nose as I hugged my legs and leaned my cheek against my knee. I missed the fragrance of the purple buds and wondered when I would see them again. I thought of my friends, how I missed them and wondered when I would get to see them again, too.



The winds circled around me and gathered steam, shaking the wisteria leaves violently. I shivered at the cold, once again staring at the grey skyline. I was mourning today. I knew it was okay to be sad, to acknowledge how I had been feeling. But I also felt the tug of guilt in my chest, reminding me of how blessed and privileged I am. Who am I to be angry? Frustrated?





I thought about the story of Job, how he lamented his situation to the Lord despite never losing faith in him. I thought of how Job cried out, exclaiming how he didn't deserve what was happening to him and didn't understand why he was facing the current trials. I felt a little silly doing so, knowing full-well how miniscule my feelings and frustrations must look in comparison to his suffering. But I remembered how convicted I felt when reading the Lord's response, humbling Job about the intricacies and mysteries of creation that he did not understand, and how it was unwise for Job to place himself in the right and God in the wrong.

I don't understand why we are where we are. I don't understand why people are suffering, I don't understand why I have to miss my community and independence so much. But what I do know is that good will come from this, in ways that I could never imagine.

I had been avoiding the outdoors for a while, content to wallow indoors away from civilization. But these thoughts gave me solace and comfort, and I headed inside as the sky opened up and it began to rain.

HOSEA 6:3
he will
come to us
like rain."