

The Myth about Dama de Noche

The Philippine plant Dama de Noche is a shrub that bears flowers that give off a strong scent at night. How this came to be is what this myth imagines it to be.

The myth starts with the time when there once was a beautiful native princess who had a knack for feeling deep emotions since she was a kid. Even as a baby, the myth says her parents noticed she would laugh when somebody in the house was so happy, and cry when somebody in the house was so sad. And as a teener she was always able to empathize with people, identifying with how they felt. "Feel" in the dialect was "dama," so she had been named Dama, the myth concludes.

Dama, the myth says, was also very fond of perfume. She and her maids would experiment on different flowers and plants in their vast garden to make perfume. According to the myth, she also always smelled fresh and fragrant especially in the night. The myth continues that her suitors, when they visited her at night, would enjoy the sweet and luring scent from her.

But one day, the myth says, she got very sick. So was so sick she couldn't get up. Her condition deteriorated and, the myth says, no amount of medication could improve her condition. The myth says even quack doctors of the barangay were consulted, as rustic people were often prone to do when a sickness seemed hopeless. The quacks tried to do some treatments and rituals on her, to no avail. The myth says all her family, friends, the quacks, and the rest of the people could do was watch her beauty and smell her fragrance till the day she died.

The myth continues that the funeral was lavished with bouquets and garlands of flowers. Even her body was bathed in perfume before being laid in her coffin. Her suitors watched helplessly as the beauty they once admired so much was being lower to its final resting place. The myth says, she was buried in the vast garden of their house.

One night, the myth says, a unique shrub was seen growing out from where Dama was buried. When it bore flowers, they emitted a sweet fragrance at night. People remembered how Dama was and insisted that the plant, when in flower, was "Dama visiting us at night." Later on, as time went by, the plant was called Dama of the night, or "Dama de Noche."

Cestrum nocturnum. Dama de noche; Queen of the Night. This not very pretty shrub grows quite quickly. It should not be planted near drains or filters as these can get blocked by the slender flowers which fall profusely. It blooms several times a year. It has flowered in January, March, May, June. The small greenish flowers have a powerful fragrance which is released at night, hence the plant's name.

Pruning to keep its size within bounds seems to encourage it to flower again. Propagation is by cuttings.