



As often happens, I don't know the English name of the potted plant. It doesn't matter. In Japanese, it's called *Gekka Bijin*, "Fair Lady Beneath Moon." That's good enough. A couple of years ago, a friend gave Yoshi a single leaf taken from a plant like this. That's all Yoshi needs – a leaf, a twig, a stem – and she'll grow a six-footer, which is the current size of our *Gekka Bijin*. I find myself fascinated by the nocturnally poignant habits of the plant. Its blooms burst forth only at night, as seen above, and they die hours later when the sun comes up, as seen below. And that's it. The wilted blossom will fall off, and the rusty bud poking out at left in the photos will repeat the short life cycle. I was inspired to write a *haiku* poem:

*Lady Under the Moon,  
Alive in Midnight's Darkness,  
Dying at Sunrise.*

**Jackson** 紅

Such a poem is supposed to have five syllables in the first line, seven in the second and five in the third. My first line has six, but I figure "the" doesn't count, since

**Jackson Sellers, August 2007**

the Japanese language has no articles. Yoshi, translating my *haiku*, encountered no 5-7-5 difficulties in Roman characters representing Japanese ideographs:

*Gekka Bijin,  
Yowa no Kagayaki,  
Ashita Tayu.*

**Yoshi** 紅

月下美人  
夜半の輝き  
朝絶ゆ





After the first night's display of a single huge blossom, we moved the *Gekka Bijin* out of the backyard darkness and onto a tiled ledge outside the kitchen. Three blossoms burst forth on the second August night, as seen at left. Two of the plant's rust-colored buds were poised to blossom on the third night. And that was it, folks. These flowers come out once and never again. They wilt and die at sunrise. Now the plant will be returned to the garden's depths, beneath a birch tree, and allowed to do whatever it wants to do. Will it bloom again before next summer? My friend George Keeton of Texas thinks it will. I don't know. Does it bloom only in August? I just don't know. It doesn't matter. We've got plenty of other flowers.

## *Gekka Bijin Footnotes*

As it turns out, the botanical name of the cactus plant is *Selenicereus grandiflorus*. Ex-*Los Angeles Times* colleague Jim Carr, a master of minutia, pointed me to a *Japan Times* webpage labeled "Gekka Bijin (Queen of the Night)." It was a garden column published in August of last year:



"The spectacular blooms ... reach their peak in the depth of the night, but by morning they have withered away. Like most nocturnal flowers, they are sweetly scented and white, so that moths and other pollinators can more easily find them glimmering in the dark. This climbing cactus is originally

from South America, but it grows well in Japan and can reach 3 meters or more in height and spread." Wow! Ours will not be allowed to get that big. Old friend Eleanor Finney, widow of a *Los Angeles Times* editor, wished to see what the inside of the blossom looked like, and I wished to show her. Easier said than done, as almost everything is. I tried several approaches and kept getting solid white images that resembled paper

cutouts, as do the three blossoms in the photo above. Finally I decided to obscure my camera's flash aperture with a free finger. It worked pretty well. See the photo below. Somehow this *Gekka Bijin* adventure got associated with *haiku* poetry. Another ex-*Times* guy, Bart Everett, tried his hand at it.

*Lady of the Moon  
Alive in midnight darkness  
Done by dawn's first light*

**Bart** 

