

Planting Chrysanthemums

It was time to transplant chrysanthemums. I began turning the soil; down on one knee. I enjoyed the fragrance of the earth in my hands. The sun warmed my back, loosening tense muscles. Working with plants is my transition away from the day's work into evening.

I heard the neighbor's screen door swing shut and remembered when I could hear my mother's voice, calling out "It's time to come in now, dinners ready". The screen door snapped shut as she turned back inside, the distressed wood didn't quite fit the doorway. Its frame was held together with a wire screwed in on opposite corners and had to swing into place twice before coming to rest against the threshold. The sound of old wood resonated on old wood after years of being askew.

I was a half-grown tomboy, playing late with my friends. We knew it was time to go in, but hiding out was imperative. The air had the edge of night on its wake. All day we'd been at the creek poised like herons over the water, waiting motionless until a crawfish came out, and its small knobby eyes bobbing wearily. Then with a quick pincher grip, we'd grab it behind the two front claws. The thrill was in catching the big ones, their tails flipping wildly as they waived their claws at us.

Returning home, we rode cardboard boxes down the steep hill behind our house; falling, running, grass-stained and intoxicated with fresh air, we ran on feeling lighter than air, our feet never seemed to touch the ground.

"You kids better come in right now". The door slammed shut this time. We came out of hiding, tagging at each other in the gathering twilight. My mother's voice was the voice of all mothers calling their stubborn children in from the night. I bounded to the door and crossed over the threshold, the door shuddered shut one final time.

When I finished transplanting the last chrysanthemums, it was twilight, that time of day the French call "le bleu", the blue hour. When the last light has not left the sky and night begins to enfold the world in layers of lavender and blue. Somewhere that tomboy is still playing in the twilight of my childhood.

