

## Plastic Echinacea

by C.G. Morelli

There's a dirt trail at the end of my street. I never paid it any mind, mostly because it's dark and gloomy and doesn't exactly scream out for attention. But it's there, and it has been for years.

I was having one of those days. My boss was all over me at work because a shipment didn't go out on time (as if I had any control over the matter) and my wife was all over me at home (and not in a good way).

I decided the wisest alternative was to steal a few moments for myself, so I walked straight out the front door, down the driveway – the one with a botany book's-worth of weeds spewing from its numerous cracks – and off down the street. I'd never actually walked it in the ten years I'd lived on the block, so I figured the pleasantries were long overdue.

It was dusk and the street lamps, in their new-aged, fiberglass casings had already flickered on and begun their nightly hum. All of the neighborhood children had apparently been called inside for dinner simultaneously because I found myself quite alone. Only the rough, scraping of my leather-soled dress shoes scuffling on the pavement accompanied me.

I passed shiny, new cars freshly waxed and ready for beads of rain water to roll off their artificial skins. I passed dilapidated cars, pocked with scratches and dents and covered in paints who'd lost a fading battle with the mid-day sun. I passed toy trucks and basketballs and fallen action figures all abandoned on the various neighborhood lawns, neatly trimmed to a uniformed half-inch. The bright white glow of the streetlights glinted off the plasticity of it all.

Before long I'd reached the end of the street without allaying any of the pressures of my day. I thought about turning and heading for home, but something held me there. Something danced before my eyes and beckoned me toward its mystery.

The dirt was soft and sandy underfoot as I plunged through bramble and landed on the trail. Not even the phosphorescence of the street lamps could penetrate the thick wall of intertwining vines and tightly-rowed tree trunks, their ancient barks withered and cracked by time. Only the hazy, semi-glow of dusk could filter through the canopy and stab down tiny spears of light along the forest floor.

As I shuffled along, the million little hands of a thorn bush tugged at my tweed suit, mosquitoes flickered and buzzed at my ears, and cobwebs tickled my nose and clung to my hair. I ventured only as far as a small clearing, large enough to allow a single, thick beam of light to shoot through the

overgrowth and shine exclusively on a lone flower. It was a purple cone flower, Echinacea, placed there seemingly by the gods; its long slender stem stood erect like a soldier and spiky petals reflected their spritish sparkle in the early glow of dusk. I was smitten.

I stared at that desolate and beautiful flower for some time, allowing its munificence and its simplicity and its grandeur to wash over me and seep through my skin as if by osmosis. Then I inhaled a deep breath of pine and wilted leaves, and headed home at ease.

© 2011 C.G. Morelli