

Esther Vincent Xueming

## Fern

*For Ealga*

You were wrapped in clear plastic  
sitting on a shelf with identical others  
and yet, somehow, you called  
to me and I listened.

Amidst the bright lights,  
the smell of synthetic wood,  
tall metal shelving and cheap hotdogs,  
there you stood, a neat bundle.

Those green fronds, slender  
fingers, wild and unruly  
in your rapid unfurling.  
I have seen how your sisters grow

in the untamed wildness  
of trees beneficent and generous,  
within the caverns of branch  
and trunk. I have touched

a mother whose arms beckoned  
me over as I held the dog  
with my right palm  
under the afternoon sun. Together,

we walked over to discover  
the cradle of leaves, the young ones  
held within. I stretched out my hand  
then, trailing this secret

as the dog squatted beside me to pee.  
I remember taking a photo,  
before she led me away  
to continue our meander.

Now you sit in a new nude pot,  
fronds reaching out into the aching space  
where below, the dog used to sleep  
and gurgle her little doggie-dream

sounds. You make peace  
with your new home. You continue  
the work of growing, day after day,  
even when grief and sorrow waterlog

your fragile roots.  
You shed old leaves unremarkably,  
leaves that brown from the edges,  
then fold quietly into that restive

space between joy and disbelief.  
Your younger self continues to frame  
old photographs where the dog  
used to sit looking out the window

or where she lay curled

on the rug in the living room.  
You release tentative shoots that burst  
forth from your belly, rising

like a tender love song  
from the rosette of a still beating heart.

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