

Monty Reid / TWO POEMS

ECHO

The boy stood in a dingy leaning over the black water.

The line was a thread of light in his hand.

He was watching the pale weeds drift in a current he
could not feel, how they leaned up at him.

There were gulls, slabs of fractured shale rising from
the lake, and when he called out the echo fell
around him like a handful of stones.

From the shore, they waved and called his name but he
was watching the underwater weeds, how his line bent,
refracted, at the surface and disappeared.

How his name fell around him in the water.

It took him an hour to row back to the fire because he
had drifted so far.

There was a small trout in his basket and he lost two
hooks in the weeds.

THE FERN

Begin with instruction, the fern hung down to the floor and
you had to keep adjusting the planter, sticking
old catalogues under it, making it higher and higher as the fronds
leaned out and down in tense arcs, all the individual
leaves dotted underneath with spores and turning
brown on the edges where they touched the carpet.

You must have done something
right, maybe the regular soakings with rainwater
collected in old tubs out back, or maybe it was
the music, simple melodies your pupils repeated so
often everyone left the house; the fern didn't
have a choice, and look how well it's done, it
hangs down to the floor and all you can do is
clip it back because you can't set the pot any higher.

That care keeps the fern alive, and simple, even tho at
your age it would be easy to forget and hard to reach
up with water, the fern keeps demanding your attention, above
the claims of all other plants, the ivy grown twice
around the room, held up with pins, the hoyas, violets, lily,
all those I never knew the names of—they claim you too
the way they think the sunlight is theirs and
it is. The fern also needs light, tho it sits out
of the direct afternoon sun and dips its fingers into
into sunlight on the rug, tentatively; it

can't resist. And where it touches the rug
the leaves curl up and die and yet, something
is nourished, new fronds uncoil downwards, nonflowering,
and I have often wondered why, among all the blossoms
that fall silently open throughout the house, so that
every morning surprises you with color, why you have loved
the uncomplicated green of this fern that has done nothing
except endure and now occupies half
the dining room. Is it the persistence that you love, that
one plant survives everything you can do to it
even love it, it stays green and now there is nowhere
for it to go except out.

Just kidding.

All I wanted to do was describe the fern
for you, to attend it with words, with something that will
also survive your love and not be anything else
to extend alternating leaves down into sunlight
at the front window. I wanted the fern to be nothing
else because you are so much like it, a patient green set
just out of the sun, unexplained except by care, how
it makes the room full, tho it has no spectacular flowers
that give themselves to comparison. The fern
has no flowers at all and will have none. But there is
this: after caring for it longer than I can remember, for
so long that even you cannot recall where you got it, you
probably didn't know its name comes from the word
for wings