

Margaret Ritchie

At the Nursery

at the rhododendrons, their clay
pots swollen, ripe soil wet and pungent you
put me in charge of the seeds, letting me go
where the small packets line up like a colorful
band of plump cellophaned players: tomatoes
carrots summer squash sealed loosely
in slick packages rattle
like a golden gourd.

I am starting my own garden
to feed the hole in my head I believe
is the only opening to my toes.

It started with the avocado
seed on my windowsill
and comes to this, my love
is caught in a plastic
glass, transparent, suspended
by wooden toothpicks, driven
past the skin to the meat, the sweet
beginnings of roots dangling
in rotten water.

I can see you at the ferns
marvelling at their bright perfection
you sift between them like an ant finally
crawling toward me at the potted pines;
like small men their arms yellow
and stiff, I think, LA smog does something
to the trees, I think
if we meet
it will be at the planted flowers:
so strong a perfume that
that section makes the eyes water.

While I touch animated pictures
of squash and carrots you
will motion for me, enveloped
between iris and bird of paradise
as if to say "in LA we have enough to eat. Let's
care for flowers despite the air."
But you are planted somewhere
between the ferns and me
carefully planning my garden I am
I am dreaming of fruit.

Margaret Ritchie's "at the nursery" received an
honorable mention for the 1987 Academy of
American Poets contest