

At the Plant Shoppe in OKC I Learn That I Need to Nurture a Plant

Lauren hands me a swathe of dry moss and tells me to press it into the bottom of my sea foam pot, right over the space where rocks fill its small hollow base. I lay the moss over the stones like a nest tucked into a hole in a tree.

She pours soil over the moss and tells me to loosen my \$12 plant from its plastic casing by squeezing the sides.

I do.

It loosens.

I carefully pull the baby fern out of the case by its slender base, soil and all, pinching it between my finger and thumb, fearful that if I pinch too hard, I will cut off its air passages.

The plant gasps.

Lauren's eyes widen and we stare at each other for a long moment before resuming our respective tasks.

It's a Saturday. Hot outside, but cool in the shop where a congregation of plants peer out the shop windows, and trowels, pots, soil, and rocks litter the assembly line countertop. Here, customers sit on barstools and curate their very own potted leafy frond while Lauren provides materials and instructions throughout the assemblage process.

After I finish potting my fern and folding a final layer of soil into the pot's scalloped edges, Lauren hands me a mason jar full of pale pebbles and tells me to spread a thin layer over the top of the soil. As I do, I hear a low moan when I brush the nape of the fern with a slightly terse edge.

This time, Lauren and I stare at the plant. The project finished, I snake my hand into my purse to retrieve my credit card—all the while eying the plant—and slide it over the counter to Lauren, who slips it away and into a chip slot, also constantly eying the plant.

We don't speak when she turns the screen around for me to sign the transaction. Gingerly, Lauren lifts the pot into an open-topped box and then holds the box close to her for a long moment, her breath shallow and deliberate. Then she looks up at me.

I take the box.

“Water it twice a week,” she whispers, “and mist it once between waterings.”

I nod.

As I am walking toward the door to leave, a man in another part of the shop observes me holding my newly potted fern. “Beautiful,” he says, and all the plants in the room begin to groan, growing their long arms toward him and rolling him into a spindle of green leafy ropes until, in a scene unsuitable to the imagination, he is decomposed, pulverized, gathered, and sculpted into the soil of several potted plants.

I stand in motionless horror, then look up toward the counter to see what Lauren has done or will do.

Nothing. She isn’t there.

Still frozen in my half-exiting place, I see her emerge from a back room with a dustpan and a broom. She smiles my way as she moves toward the dust on the floor—what is left of the decomposed man. “Bye!” she beams up at me cheerily, “Enjoy your new plant!”

Kimberly Priest is the author of *White Goat Black Sheep* (FLP) and her poetry has appeared in several literary journals. A recent MFA graduate of New England College, she currently lives in OK where she is an English Instructor at Oklahoma Baptist University and an editor for the *Nimrod International Journal*.