**Autumn**

Esther Ra

The wind has opened its gentle palm,

crackled leaf spilling golden and glorious

like coins from a generous sky. Sleeves

tiptoe down my arms and froth over my wrists

like blue blossoms. My skirts are lapping

at my feet like waves. I realize, with surprise,

I am happy. I breathe in, thinking *thank you*;

I breathe out, sending love. Despite a year

in which breathing itself has grown barbs

and the sirens blare sickness each day,

we are still granted these tiny, tender triumphs.

A new sprig breaks open in the office potted

plant. My mother throbs with beauty in her small,

fragile frame; every day a little closer to leaving,

every day a little more lovely and alive. *What is*

*happiness*, a North Korean defector once told me,

*but waking up in the morning and going to sleep*

*without once having wanted to die?* Last night

my youngest sister prepared for her first college quiz,

proudly naming every country in Africa.

Her spread maps crackled brightly as leaves

as she pointed to islands, fragrant republics.

Wonders we had lived with but scarcely known

rippled russet, ruptured through the air.

We listened with bated breath.

We sat up and applauded, amazed.