

## *Orchids*

by Alexandra Umlas

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When they are mostly dead,  
your friends bring them to you. Veined  
and spotted open-mouthed soldiers  
standing bloodless on the counter.

Nothing rivers through the stems.  
They cannot even slouch.  
You replant them, tuck their roots,  
add bark and moss, cut

stems, mend the wounds  
with cinnamon. Early mornings,  
when the sun spills across the kitchen,  
the newest orchids are born back

to life. They stare at you with their sepals,  
send tubers out, green and full.  
This morning, one licks its yellow  
labellum and smiles. It's hard to tell

who is growling, who is yawning.  
Something so aware requires a strange  
discipline. At times you want to let  
the petals turn thin. You wish they would

give up their green. Instead they follow  
orders. When your friends come over,  
they ask which is theirs. You don't keep  
track. They run their eyes up and down

each sticky stem like they regret  
what they have done. When they leave,  
the orchids sneer, then go back to pressing  
their faces to the window's winter sun.