

Like a Prayer—  
*Phormium tenax*  
Tyler Chadwick

How that late sabbath afternoon you sat cross-legged on their lawn, Elder S at your side, the couple just across, their backs to her late summer garden— How conversation meandered like your two months in that town—you and S rambling metal roads along the harbor, through coastal bush, seeking strangers seeking God— How their words now hush behind memory but her giving lingers— How mid-story she turned and plucked a flax leaf from the garden— How, still telling, she folded the leaf at the spine, pinched with her nails just in from the column, stripped it from the blade— How she pinched then stripped the blade's tapered edge, then pinched and stripped again to yield thinner straps— How the straps flexed away from her touch as she curled them between her fingers to soften the weave— How she unfolded episodes from their story while folding the strips upon themselves—and again—and again—and again—until she held out two small plaits— How you and S *kia ora*-ed her giving— How your piqued forefinger and thumb kept telling the weave, kept telling the thin strands she left feathered off one end— How you carried the plait in your scriptures even long after your return— How you displayed it on a bookshelf— How you boxed it away in a move with other relics of your past— How you've pulled it from the closet— How you turn it in hand— How your forefinger and thumb had forgotten the flex of her grace—

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Previously published in Tyler Chadwick, *Litany With Wings* (Salt Lake City: BCC Press, 2022).