greens

golden shovel after Clifton’s “cutting greens”

the washin

inhale the potlikker smell curlin
through the first floor, Nellie n em
runnin round
the living room. I

fold & roll. one hand holds
them in place ends frayed their
stiff rebellion, all crunch and body
chiffoned. prepare the water. pour in
the greens. the salt. the vinegar let the worms & dirt & other obscenities
embrace
the steel bottom think

and wash the day of
its burdens of every heavy thing
it has forced you to carry. wash the day but
keep the evening smell that seeps through every screen door the smell of kin
comin to help wash & eat. hand your niece the collards
and
her sister the kale

scrub & strain
again. again. brace yourself against
the edge of the sink wash & score the smoked meat four lines each.

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the stewin

no stranger
to the long cook
drop in a turkey tail. another.

walk away
from
the kitchen / cut the radio on

my my my my my my

you sho look good tonight
your husband wrappin from behind
his kiss makin
you sway together
hands
lead &
drag you from the room
from their
earshot. the irony
of us
stewin down the bed

& the pot
no stranger to the
long cook
this bed / pot
ain’t
done
the greens (and I) needed stirrin
dem kids (Black
as all hell) knew the
timin.
Gramma echoed down the hall
cuttin
through the steam
& headboard
flashbacks. is
it worth gettin up?
leaving this black
skinned brother in my
bed. I look him over
they know what to do, I decide
grab his hand
&
lay back. just
for
a
minute.

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the bowl & honey cornbread

I remove the
lid & hover, the greens
steamin up the stovetop
eyrolls
fly from the line at the stove. (you know bout Black folks & lines, right?) so I hold the first waiting bowl under the ladle glide the knife through the bread’s browned crust. & again about 7 times the line dispersed / the chairs full they spat who gon clean the kitchen? between mouthfuls. the day’s stories & who’s datin who all twisted round the table dark settled just beyond the porch the tv still on / the newslady still whinin the family all here & its spine &

head & feet watching from the stove I looked on at my babies with their babies & could taste the passage in my natural Black hands. an appetite: the promise of bond & gathering over a hot plate the food of living Black things everywhere.

Edythe Rodriguez is a Philly-based poet who studied Africology and creative writing at Temple University. She has received fellowships from The Watering Hole, Brooklyn Poets, and Palm Beach Poetry Festival. Edythe loves neo-soul, battle rap, and long walks through old poetry journals.