

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* *mymymy*

*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  
too. 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 eyerolls

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.

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