

Father of the Empty Bowl

Ama Codjoe

I am watching the future of your body
molder. Gristle, wild boar, mole's fur, apple
core, mulberry, wind-downed leaf.

By now your cells are forest black earth
or the moist dirt in a flower pot.

Father, I've waded this far in order
to speak to your smallest ear.
I've come to ask some speechless thing.

Time has passed, there are no longer
seasons, and I barely recall the name
for water—often when I say *blood* I mean
water. Maybe I've come to ask forgiveness,
to properly grieve your fatherlessness . . .

It's hard to tell. My eyes have been
shut for some time. Pieces of me keep

breaking off, shifting, even the you
in me has changed. While you cooked
oxtail soup, I set the table. You sat

at the head, sucked the marrow, twirled,
licked, and chewed the bone. Father,

you left nothing in the bowl because
when there was food you ate the food
and brought the bowl like a cup to your lips.

And I love like that. I call you *father*
because my arm is finally long enough to reach

across earlier oceans. Farther, you say,
and losing my tongue I stretch far

until I am sky. Father, I whisper, searching
for my teeth. Doves, you say. Mourning,
I repeat. Let the doves do the calling for me.

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