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.