

the translator

I pick things apart as I go.

I linger, I take my time

singe the edges, then simmer the

middle in seductive flames,

I sort them, consider their heft—

when I speak,

consider it encrusted in char

aroma delicate sweet smoke—

my words may be few.

it takes time to find comfort

scorching more

than one thing at a time

I don't need another to tend

the fire because believe me,

It'll be glorious when

I burn it all down.

the demon

i want to melt perfection to its bones
sift through the kaleidoscope mass, hands bloody
harness its desperate tenacity,
trace the mangled joints with abandoned fangs,
snap the slender clavicle
jenga an enduring, sensible
woman out of me
and knock the whole shit over
emerge from the sludge
dank and new.

yet named

you, like leaves, unfurl
limbs splayed in porcelain tomb.
you asked if memory holds truth.
roasts it as oolong
honeyed tones in chrysalis positions,
watching rapture inside some hallow knowing.
toe tip around beating intention – the root –
it is imprint to life sagas.
life to imprint—
is it root? the intention
beating around tip toe?
knowing hallow some inside
rapture, watching positions
chrysalis in tones honeyed.
oolong, as it roasts truth,
holds memory, if asked. you
tomb porcelain in splayed limbs,

unfurl leaves like you.

the progenitor

I don't much fear being alone. with time, it'll all be dust anyhow. been farming all my life, but ain't never knew what happened to my seeds. whether they forgot my face, my voice, my mark— they were sprinkled all along them mountains, you know, to them white families. I know they was glad. all those Black children, that hard labor, that baby-rearing— they was tryin' to wear me down from the bottom, couldn't wait til everything of mine was an “estate.” they knew my name. I hear someone say once that I ain't want to be a slave no more, that I'd make my own way— damn right. I traded hills for skycrests— ain't you ever seen the sun glide over them rough mountain tops? I was always waiting for that first bird to say his good morning. I knew I done something right then.

descendant / ancestor
ekphrasis for Kin I (Our Folks) after Whitfield Lovell

if you remember anything, never look away.
even if you have to remain seeing under
wide brim, sweat dripping down your
beautiful weary face. i saw you before i
knew you and honestly

all i ever wanted was for you to find
happiness— to take that fedora from your
head and say to you, “come, please rest a
little.”

to present to you a room to breathe in, let
limbs, exhaling, inhaling free fall into
sunken chair slumber

nothing here beckons you suffocate. smooth
your aged brow, sleep a hundred thousand
hours. i will tell them your name, cradle
your unwavering stare like precious water—
tell them how tears would let you drown,
always aching to engulf your shadow.

i saw the light of fear reflected in his eyes
encased in cornea, seared in pupil. every
part of me has ached as long as i can
remember, nevermind knees crackling under
weight of prayers. i have known elation, i
have known grief, i have known rage. i have
been crushed as flags marred underfoot. i
have feared simple things, tools held in my
own hands.

i have lost myself in walks. careful ruminous
baptisms washed over body whole. i have
recited the names of my wife and children,
my old name. my parents long dead. these
things were familiar. these feet could walk a
hundred thousand miles, each footstep a
prayer embossed in clay.

if you remember anything, never cease your
walkings. never look away.