

HONORÉE FANONNE JEFFERS

Suddenly in Grace

How in the bowl the collards steamed,
hiding gifts of meat and tomatoes.
How the chicken was cloaked
in its brown robe of singing fat.
How the cornbread could have been supper alone,
had been to others in starved times.

Again, look at the table.
How my mother plucked the greens
from her modest garden out back
and through the summer she chased
away creatures from the tomatoes,
righteously planting marigolds.
How she could have grown corn
so tall, she said, if only she had the land.
How her hands did not wring this chicken's
neck but her mother's did another.

Again.
How she baptized the greens in gallons
of water, scrubbed the stiff, unforgiving leaves.
How her back was turned to me
where she stood at the sink.
How she kept from speaking to my anger, lips tucked,
a bland face, head bowed suddenly in grace.
How she was determined to feed me.

Again.
How she plunged the greens over and over,
watched the water run free of dirt
and tried to teach me this way back,
though I had no interest then.
How she finally taught me, insistent.
How a last meal must be clean.