Abandon

VIEVEE FRANCIS

I have let go of the trees for other trees, forest for woods,
mountains for mountains, wolves for bears. Bears for fishercats.

When the rain left. I threw off my coat.
I happily ran down a wet trail. Who cared that I ran?

My father said a woman like me should not run. My face as insulting
as my body (that was never thin enough).

I wanted to run from him
but he held me there, would not let go, would not let me leave.

But the trees turned and so did I.

I gave myself over to the autumn,
to the red and gold of the day,
and the pain gives way at last. At least, for a time.

When he finally did let go there wasn’t much left
of me. I went to seed. I made a field of myself.
I planted a tiny garden inside that no one could reach.

I grow small tomatoes. There is always dirt
under my nails.
About the author

Vievee Francis is the author of four books of poetry: The Shared World (Northwestern University Press, 2023); Forest Primeval (TriQuarterly Books, 2015), winner of the 2017 Kingsley Tufts Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award; Horse in the Dark (Northwestern University Press, 2012), winner of the Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize; and Blue-Tail Fly (Wayne State University Press, 2006). Her work has appeared in numerous journals, textbooks, and anthologies including Poetry, Harvard Review, Yale Review, Best American Poetry, spin.com, and Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry. She is also the recipient of a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship and a 2021 Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry. She is a Professor of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College.