

## O Tobacco

You are a Kentucky tiller's livelihood.  
You were school clothes in August  
the turkey at Thanksgiving  
Christmas  
with all the trimmings.

I close my eyes  
see you tall  
stately green  
lined up in rows.  
See sweat seeping  
through Granddaddy's shirt  
as he fathered you first.

You were protected by him  
sometimes even more  
than any other thing  
that rooted in our earth.

Just like family you were  
coddled  
cuddled  
coaxed  
into making him proud.

Spread out for miles  
you were the only  
pretty thing  
he knew.

When I think of you  
at the edge of winter,  
I see you, brown, wrinkled  
just like Granddaddy's skin.

A ten-year old me  
plays in the shadows  
of the stripping room  
the wood stove burns  
calloused hands twist  
through the length  
of your leaves.  
Granddaddy smiles  
nods at me when he  
thinks I'm not looking.

You are pretty  
and braided

lined up in rows  
like a room full of  
brown girls  
with skirts hooped out  
for dancing.

-Crystal Wilkinson

Wilkinson, C. (2021). *Perfect Black*. University Press of Kentucky.

<https://www.wvpublic.org/section/arts-culture/2021-04-26/q-a-with-crystal-wilkinson-kentuckys-new-poet-laureate>