

Weeding Fish Mint

By Thu Nguyen - Gaithersburg, MD

I call you by all your names: Chinese lizard tail,
fish leaf, heart leaf, chameleon of my yard.
The man with Roman numeral tattoos tears a bit of
your fishy flesh from the bolted weedy bed as he
pretends to gag, throws a piece of you into the grass.
I hate that stuff, he says; last time he touched you
he could smell and taste you for the rest of the day
and week, and I think he's exaggerating, but I hope
he isn't. As I watch him continue to dig and toss
dirt and roots, I think: he'll have to keep coming back
if he's that careless. I hear my mother tell me
*this is what you get when you hire a white gardener
to do the things you don't want to do*. He doesn't know
where you came from, that I grew you along
the border I shared with my neighbor who never says hello,
hoping you'd spread your volatile oil so she'd have no choice
but to notice me. He doesn't know the magic of how
you'll haunt him: regrow rhizomes from any
segment of foliage, propagate by division. He doesn't know
all the good you can do picked tender: how you taste
wrapped around a spring roll, how my grandmother
swears you help her with her memory. There's so much
he doesn't know, I might never make him understand,
not without grabbing a fistful, shoving some in his mouth,
making him eat a whole salad of fish mint and dirt,
tell him it's ok, it's good for him, isn't it good?