

# Sorrow Is Not My Name

By Ross Gay

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No  
matter the florid, deep sleep awaits.  
There is a time for everything. Look,  
just this morning a vulture  
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,  
and I looked at him, admiring  
the sickle of his beak.  
Then the wind kicked up, and,  
after arranging that good suit of feathers  
he up and took off.  
Just like that. And to boot,  
there are, on this planet alone, something like two  
million naturally occurring sweet things,  
some with names so generous as to kick  
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,  
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks  
at the market. Think of that. The long night,  
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me  
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.  
But look; my niece is running through a field  
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel  
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.  
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—for Walter Aikens

Notes:

The epigraph of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.

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Ross Gay was born in Youngstown, Ohio. Gay is an editor with the chapbook presses Q Avenue and Ledge Mule Press and is a founding editor, with Karissa Chen and Patrick Rosal, of the online sports magazine 'Some Call it Ballin.' He earned a BA from Lafayette College, an MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College, and a PhD in English from Temple University. He teaches at Indiana University.

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