



All these **great barns** out here in the outskirts,  
black creosote boards **knee-deep** in the **bluegrass**.  
They look **so beautifully abandoned**, even in use.

You say they look like **arks** after the sea's  
dried up, I say they look like **pirate ships**,  
and I think of that walk in the valley where  
J said, **You don't believe in God?** And I said,  
**No. I believe in this connection we all have to nature, to each other, to the universe.**

And she said, **Yeah, God.** And how we stood there,  
**low beasts among the white oaks, Spanish moss, and spider webs**, obsidian shards stuck in our pockets, woodpecker flurry, and I refused to call it so.

So instead, **we looked up at the unruly sky**,  
its clouds in simple animal shapes we could name  
though we knew they were really just clouds—  
**disorderly, and marvelous, and ours.**

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Ada Limón  
US Poet Laureate, 2022-present  
"What It Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use" (2012)

Maybe it is a small needful fact  
that everything turns back into flowers one day.  
I say daffodil  
and someone laughs in their sleep.  
I say arum  
and my student disappears from the toes up.  
And isn't that what gardening is? Choosing the colors that will survive?

When you write about the child, do not say their name.  
Talk about the season your garden  
what's growing despite. And I get it—  
They are tired of hearing about what we sow.  
Tell them  
we are tired of talking about what they reap.

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DJ Rogers  
[after Ross Gay's "A Small Needful Fact" and Jay Ward's "Ars Poetica in Which the Dead Child is Renamed as a Flower"]  
Durham Poet Laureate, 2022-3

Measure the walls. Count the ribs. Notch the long days. Look up for blue sky through the spout. Make small fires with the broken hulls of fishing boats. Practice smoke signals. Call old friends, and listen for echoes of distant voices. Organize your calendar. Dream of the beach. Look each way for the dim glow of light. Work on your reports. Review each of your life's ten million choices. Endure moments of self-loathing. Find the evidence of those before you. Destroy it. Try to be very quiet, and listen for the sound of gears and moving water. Listen for the sound of your heart. Be thankful that you are here, swallowed with all hope, where you can rest and wait. Be nostalgic. Think of all the things you did and could have done.

Remember treading water in the center of the still night sea, your toes pointing again and again down, down into the black depths.

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Dan Albergotti  
"Things to Do in the Belly of the Whale" (2016)

I killed a spider  
Not a murderous brown recluse  
Nor even a black widow  
And if the truth were told this  
Was only a small  
Sort of papery spider  
Who should have run  
When I picked up the book  
But she didn't  
And she scared me  
And I smashed her

I don't think  
I'm allowed

To kill something

Because I am

Frightened

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Nikki Giovanni  
"Allowables" (2013)

*New Year on my mountain*

mama says: long noodles, long life,  
so I slurp them loud, drink gingery  
broth— polka-dot beads of sweat  
forming as my nose hovers over  
the soup's steam. circles for luck.

circles on my dress. papa says:  
make a lot of noise! so the children  
bang on pots & pans to hush  
yesterday's demons. later, in the cold,

the family plods up the hill to wonder  
at the fireworks, sky like a warzone lit  
with spraying flames from Roman  
Candles—  
fire on the ground from Watusi whips  
snaking  
& coiling, sizzling our feet.

I feel it all in my chest—  
a drumming,  
a warning, a spell.

back in the yard, granny doles out rice  
& meat, pineapple liquor, glass bottles  
of Sprite. but I am snoring by  
midnight,  
my sisters & I still swathed in red  
chiffon.

by morning, I cry because I missed it.  
I cry because they say I'm not alone.  
I cry because home is a warning,  
its pulse a whiff of flint in the dark.

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Ina Cariño.  
"Everything is Exactly the Same  
as it Was the Day Before" (2023)