

Jane Springer

WHERE

I'm searching for the warehouse of beaches where Archimedes counts sand
I've got a problem with the counting, not the math — but the money
in the moneychanger's hand & the smokestack, not the oxygen, the fire
in the nostril of an ass — but the jukebox in the warehouse where
the counting goes down's turned under the siren's wave-
leveled shotguns, wake of new construction, clamshack
where you couldn't find an accidental pearl if you led all the buffalo
from auction to the ocean — & wouldn't that add up to another wrong
junction? It used to be

on Gains St. where the wild orange ranged — I'm looking for the stingray
in a gravel parking lot, sea oats sweeping busted windows, not the
glass — but some translucence, & I get so tired of propaganda: Eat More
Seaweed! It's misleading — a teensy-weensy sphere eluding grasp, stuck
to wings of no-see-ums', swatting, losing, not the Fuji or the
figgy pudding but the sunburn peeling back to original skin —
it's taken seven days to get the salt map with its axis of symmetry
aligned, I've a problem with the logic — not the beaches, but the cosmic
sale that came, beforehand.

PSALM

Blessed is the one who don't
do-si-do with the man
or vogue in the way that gunmen take
or sit in the company of harangues,
but whose delight is in creek that has no face,
& who meditates on its current day and night.
That metaphysical giant is like a stranger's song,
that sidles the lawn
& whose barn does not weather —
whatever they love becomes better than law.

Not so the others!
They are like spammed ads
jellied in the can.
Therefore they can't stand in the awareness,
or speculate in the choir of plain nature —
for the Groove watches over the way of the devoted,
but the way of the others leads yonder.

NORTH COUNTRY FIG STORY

House of celebration, here happens the grand opening of my brain — let the salmon's 'I' swim silent & learn Don Juan's hard 'J.' Guests bring dear wines with divots deep enough to fit Vienna sausage cans. A Tidy Bowl ad — they swish in spit-cups — I'm like, Damn! You can't save that shit for later, now.

'What a comfy house, Lived-in' the guests file in. An affront, our fridge, where a novel scrap begins 'Pepper,' & ends 'Transcendent Fuck.' Is this proper literature, w/an 8-year kid? Enter fine cheese, ash layers it same as bloodlines run through quartz. This should probably not remind me of Holocaust lamps —

that's my mama talking, we called mom The Dark Knight.
You could open conversation with D.K.
by winning a Nobel —
but no way to steer it from Aunt Nila's macerated hip.

In our house, it's fatal to hit 'play' on any machine. Enter the guest's figs. Squashy with tough dishwasher-colored skin, my mate & kid know better than to touch — but One hits 'play' on CD, Lucy Bogan brags a bluesy 'I got nipples on my titties,' the second his 'play' on *Assassin's Creed* — innards split a screen, is this appropriate? The natives' customs are un-known — seems Ovid's not drawled long of 'O.'

Here they cut fried chicken with knives. Here they heat Saran to windows with hair dryers & call it *insulation*, they don't wear house shoes to the grocery but parade town zipped in sleeping bags called *coats* — no one flashes gold

teeth. Often snow, as in Kandahar it snows — though
I once thought all the Middle East

a sand globe.

The ‘livedin look’s’ due to our wild dogpack tearing 3 linoleum
layers to concrete. The largest mass exposes big fake
bricks. ‘The rural art of decay,’ guests joke, trying to qualify
this home where horse devours steam on the kitchen’s washer,
what’s hid under a lace tablecloth I dried on high
instead of taking time to iron —

back home the mamas shoot you for less.

My daddy makes kickass pimento cheese, what came from
government, back when, now even Junot Diaz pokes
fun of Velveeta. I want to be polite & don’t think the crowd
can hear her when I says: Weird. How you supposed
to eat it? The fig. Genus Ficus, from the family
Moraceae.

We had a Ficus when we came here, kept it in basement,
did just fine — brought it up for spring, lost its leaves —
dead naked in the driveway BANG just like that, as if
the daylight shocked it.

Then comes this long wave of awe:

‘She never had one?’

‘She never did!’

‘Really?’

‘Never had a fig,’

as if I’d never read *Figagain’s Wake*.

I read Harlequins in highschool, I read The Dark Knight’s
copy of *Richard Nixon’s Breach of Faith*. That’s where I
learned George Bush the senior used to side with women’s
rights but flip-thonged when he came into orifice. When you

come into office it's suspected you change. 'It will
change your life!' our guests say

about the fig, they reminisce over their first ones, not yet ripe
& sour appleish or tender fleshed, sweet — *naïveté*, at home
that's same as earnest or plumstupid.

Fuck! We forgot a mousetrap
by the toaster, mouse stirs, peanutbutter whiskered.

Our son's dropped his sirs & ma'ams to purchase apps of tanks,
my husband's slapped a tip jar down, he handles snakes,
the bloodhounds bellydance. But this party's circled in on
me, counting on impending fig-nirvana while I stink
eye the thingy. 'Not yet!' one shouts, 'you have
to halve it.'

Like yang & yin, the halved
babe of King Solomon's
decision, Berlin before
the wall came down —
Mason & Dickson, or the last
elephant separated from
its tusk. One might
imagine Eve's fig
leaf served a county line
between her pubic &
the public.

'Get her a napkin, she may find the fruit too rich.'

The Dark Knight disliked being talked about in 3rd person while
present, while halved in her wheelchair. Up here they
call that agency, they say 'She wanted agency,' that she
deserved it. An agent got our pal a mess of cabbage for selling
filmrights to his murderous Virginia gin-running
family's gossip. No one owns him, now.

If you talk agency where we're from, you mean realestate, your house is paid for. You pay for it by plying your friends with bourbon, not wine they hesitate to drink all the way down. Soon cash flows from every edifice — that's why we say 'he shit a ton of brinks' — the bricks is bought, not stolen. Stealing is what tourists

do, unwittingly. They chip lava rocks from a volcano's precipice they're so unfamiliar with they don't realize it's Vesuvius rolling underfoot, that's how they get conned into snipe hunts. The natives always tell you, you catch these gourmet birds by dragging a bag, blindfolded, while they scream & beat the bushes 1 mile down a bayou.

The blindfold's so you hear the fowl, better to catch it.

Listen. The truck guns farther than a mile away, 20 or 3000, far as Pluto or my father's voice, & now my watch drops to the swamp, like those New Years' crows falling from Arkansas sky after fireworks. What they don't tell you is the bag must be burlap, you have to go at midnight, you will do some time in exile.

Someone hands me a halved fig, the guests watch me, close as a Polanski flick, my mouth hangs, an open sack. Outside strange rustlings — a possum party calling dressed in tuxedos of dead leaves, maybe. The figs: shipped in from a neutral country. I loves these comrades.

They're intelligent, humane, even. They've brought our family gifts the way one honored Agamemnon, or how my first professors brought me 'real books,' not with condescension's air, but glad hearts, blooming irises. For all I knows, the figs waft myrrh & frankincense. But I'm ashamed to own a house at all, shame — a sacred place.

The dogs chewed off the cabinet door corners, our sills hold

job site bottles no one else would keep. Floors slope
so bad you'd think you row a johnboat to Lethe. The crowd's
impatient for the story's end, but this is not the branch's
story — why should the branch always get to hold the grapes
just out of the fox's reach?

If the great Bedouin, Antar, offered a fig to the fox, who'd never
had one, he might say:

'her mouth is as an ungrazed meadow,
whose herbage the rain has guaranteed,
in which there is but little dung;
and which is not marked with the feet of animals.'

But every fox holds the mother in her knows the sublime is
two parts revelation & one secret

kept.

WAH WAH PETAL

When a blues band shops for real music it may cost a walk, an hour or year,
a man left by a woman, a chest of guns—

two suns.

*

So this longneck gets her own war. She can't believe the fireworks parading
through her chest.

Her table so changed:
The Army-issue breakfast—she pees real bullets.

She's happy, but there are times her apartment window combusts.

*

Last night two sons of guns shoot bullets at an army of doves. But it's dark,
they miss—& a blues man becomes

a changed woman.

*

So this man, a real firecracker, parades through the door holding an Iraqi boy
across his chest. Tells me he can't believe war

is good & puts the little boy to sleep with a shot of music. Who am I to tell
him what to do?

We make love with his gun, then breakfast.

*

No combusted doves, here, or bullet breakfast—changed times left the Army in a rock bar, happy.

The doves? Sometimes Eve lets them sleep beside her cheek.

*

So this woman in a Little Rock bar walks up & tells me about her son she loves who returned Iraq two years ago today.

Two longnecks cost a dollar, it's Happy Hour.

She lets him sleep with his Army issue gun across his chest—who is she to tell him what to do—he left a boy, now a man, the gun aids sleep.

Sometimes when making breakfast—she can't believe it's him at her table so changed. He's ok but there are times.

Last New Years Eve they made it through the afternoon parade, were window shopping when firecrackers combusted & he dove

under a truck, would not come out. The time she got up in the dark to pee he shot a bullet through the door beside her cheek.

How can she tell him—time he get his own apartment?

They play good music in this bar, a real blues band.

PSALM 2

There will be very little nudity except for the soft underbelly
of ibis, jalapenos in the greens —
you thought all the angels ate sorghum & drank Courvoisier?

& there will be primal tears in the shag carpet, tea-olive
oscillating from the fan even now you are nodding,

having accepted you'll never be home again.

ROCK

The coral in the mortar

seems not to do with a second kiss behind the fortuneteller's
booth, Spike Easterling's

Bubblicious mouth parted, tectonic plates to admit

hostages

we did not understand, that year

Ali's proposal to my sis, eating kookoo sabzi & osh on pillows,
in our socks

could be dangerous,

braces caught — I thought Spike quartz to my feldspar, that
Ayatollah's surname was Khomeini,

we thought plain water too severe for dinner —

at the fair, Spike's hand all day in my back pocket, lamb we
pet then had to put back,

to get my sister's passport — I liked the new ziggurat scarf
fluttered waves in

her hair,

Jimmy Carter's name conjured peanuts & the hall of mirrors
where his brother stayed drunk

enough to brand his own beer, there's a carnival incense floats
over bleating

commercials for uranium, *esfand* — reminds me of diabase, dactite
the rhyolite of Iran, less than

all the bowing we did

at Ali's apartment, prayer mats rolled up like magic carpets &
ticket to the double

Ferris wheel of my sister's almost-marriage, chador folded
in her suitcase if a

suitcase served as temple

hard rock playing by the scrambler, cigarette butts smashed
by cotton candy in the mudwash

by the fair gate, rock of ages
rock of oil lamps, olives,

if only I hadn't kissed Spike's brother, first, that morning's
rollercoaster wrecked between

two possible countries — vision of a market lamb's

full head on ice, in the kitchen
Amy's crying, failed

Operation Eagle Claw, then Ali's weird
disappearance, what love

elects may appear glassy to aphanitic to porphyritic
deception,

Rock,

Who first settled you
in Cain's hand?

PSALM 3

Questions sparked gold in the gingko's litter, the pipeline bolt
held in its mold & wild horses grazed Bahia,
the steppes of central Asia —

The graves of our mothers sprang mouths & still lay lakes
you could drink from, straight. Did you know whole
species of lightning bugs fly at differing

heights?

Scant elders tended gardens outside the hard drive's census,
down 9 mile swamp, otter play — & we could believe
that ivory billed woodpecker still sang beside

the landfill of defunct cells —

Little life, I never learned how not to be earnest enough for
strangers — each time the plane touched down I kissed
the continuous dirt turning worms

under me, to you.

WHICH OF THESE UTICAS DOES NOT BELONG

What if it was not the salt of this body I want dissolved, but the other
body I'd become?

You will know them by their brine —

The first year's barrage of defunct chimneys, factory windows
blacked out to churches-

purple cloth, olive oil, wine,

late-converted into dental offices, weedy alleys, sleet, the ruin-porn
of garbage-

piers — & what sophisticated moorings.

cats — it seemed all the Victorians in Utica burned between blizzards

In a cork tree forest, their sick figures,

& we froze with 'new' scenarios, the bejeweled anchorwoman's rented
dress — cut to

children buried in clay pots,

the reporter, stoic-chic, by the overturned toboggan — slow fade,
computer graphic:

their bellows reveal intake valves,

Insurance Fraud? lettered gold across ash steps —

an ocean fixed in mosaic —

How not to feel stylistically removed
from a wealth
of kitsch-
sentiment?

papyrus's fragility cancels accurate accounts.

The Roman arches of Trajan must have served passage, too, for some pedestrian's longing

*We don't need no water
let the motherfucker burn!*

to bring down the gilt statues stuck above their entrance, Utica —
how lonely, now, your giant

By their no-face doll, you'll know them —

turtle fountain looks by the city's vacant floorplan & adjacent sand-
scape. & our heat kept

their water filled drums made a deeper sound.

cutting out, & our car kept rolling smoke over who knows what
tribes buried by the Mohawk

By their meat preserved in brine,

river's bank. Ancient City. People of the Standing Stone. What
Phoenician could get

reservation cigarettes, casinos.

past your Majardah's mouth, filled with the agrarian silt runoff —
or the cheap-o-commercials

Only if you speak with elders —

sung by men in leisure suits, so our kid kept reciting: 'Call your
Peoples' Lawyer,

you will know them by shekó:lih,

when you need a lifeline?' & we went weeks seeing no one but
these skeletal structures —

elm bark lodge, survival beadwork —

that's how identical the gods' fingerprints became — by Utica's
everlasting late trains,

Did you hear wind sing your name?

THEN THE GHOST

Sent a great wind through the corn, and such a violent storm arose that the tractors threatened to overheat.

All the drivers were afraid and each cried out to his own granary. And they threw personal radios to the field path to lighten the load.

But the martyr stayed in the root cellar, where she lay down Dreamlandia.

Not even coyotes could wake her, ‘How can you sleep? Get up and call on your DJ to restore productivity.’

Then the drivers said to each other, ‘Come, let us paper scissors rock to determine who is responsible for this cataclysm.’

& it was all scissors to the martyr’s paper. So they asked her, ‘Tell us, who’s to blame for heisting our livelihood? What kind of work do you do?’

What fantasy do you dwell in? Who are your people? What’s the zip?’

She said, ‘I am worshipper of the last native tree whose roots poison the soil & whose fruits fall on the witless squirrel yet

when the green husks ferment several months, issues forth an indelible ink — even if my peeps once were blue skinks, & from the map of my marker

comes barks so various they never repeat.’