

Lisa Russ Spaar

Invention 1

Garden

Serried tassels gossip above, argue with sky,
Seussean mitres in bishopric rows,
crowded cornstalks through which I follow
the old man. He gives each plush husk

a hyphen-cut to check the cob, its readiness.
Kernels pearled, all? If so, a wrenched blur,
chop chop, with the knife of his father's father,
& like a fish lobbed into a basket on the Sea of Galilee

it goes. Bees, flies, blue dragonflies hover.
In truth, I'm thinking of my lover.
Lugging along behind my father, I'm this black snake,
dead & threaded in pieces through the fence's brake.

What's the tonic chord here? Him? Us? Me?
Small doses of death, meted out, so we can be?

Invention 6

Ballade

As a sparrow flits minefields,
wind the corpse's heels.

With hands fugitive,
confessions dative,

saying do you want, will you —
yes, I will. I will die without you.

Inside me, a prayer,
a whisper-urn of air,

light in my larynx,
dark in my autumn drink,

full-bodied & true. Don't move.
No one above you,

tremulo, torpedio, nuncio.
My tomorrow.

Lisa Russ Spaar

Invention 7

August

One long Sunday night,
kairos bleeding into dread
& the soon-to-be-resumed yoke
as field pixelates sonically.

Cicadas, peepers, staccato wire,
creakings, shrieks, grief
off-gassing summer's story.
No accusation in the din:

older, older, old giving away
change loose as air.
So few in dire times will care
for this pastoral cry,

which is no lie, despite its folly,
apolitical as earth, its doomed valise.

Invention 9

Breaststroke

In the yard, even the deer refuse to startle
at this hour, elegant skulls nosing
earth's perpetual weeping-holes
as first light erodes nightmare's pall.

With bare feet, rolled towel, I cross
lawn, wince of driveway scar,
blue broken gate already rusted ajar
& cross the concrete apron

to take steps — toes, soles, ankles —
down. Always, for me a threshold
to surrender gravity, ground.
This is a solo étude for two hands

pushed out, then back, a kind of prayer,
but palms not touching. As lungs once practiced air.