

NURSERY RAPS

JUSTIN SPRING

NURSERY RAPS:

A SOULSPEAK E-BOOK

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin Spring's poems have been published in *American Poetry Review*, as well as numerous anthologies such as *Florida in Poetry*. He is the recipient of many prizes and honors and is the author of seven collections of poems, *Polaroid Poems*, *Other Dancers*, *Talkies*, *Nursery Raps*, *Poems for Family and Friends*, *Poems of Sarasota and Florida* and *Collected Poems 1985-2014*.

Mr. Spring is also one of a handful of poets in the country who compose in the ancient oral mode. His SOULSPEAK oral poetry can be found on the following *MANY VOICES/SOULSPEAK Studio* CDs: *Gathering*, *Smoke*, *Nursery Raps*, *Speakings*, *In Your Mind*, *Witnesses Log*, *I'm Talking to You Oprah*. He has also created over one hundred video *Dreamstories*—his pioneering video versions of SOULSPEAK oral poetry.

Mr. Spring is also the author of four prose works: SOULSPEAK: *The Outward Journey of the Soul*; ALICE HICKEY: *Between Worlds*; Mirrors: *the Aborigine Poetry of Eldred Vannoy*, and RIVER MOTHER: *The Face of the Sphinx*.

Mr. Spring was educated at Columbia College. He has three children and lives in Mexico and the United States.

For My Children

Margy

JD

Art

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Girl with a Curl Tells it All,
CHESTER H.JONES ANTHOLOGY 1998

Little Boy Blue Lays Down a Line,
CHESTER H. JONES ANTHOLOGY 1996

The White Rabbit Explains the Creative Process,
SARASOTA ARTS REVIEW

Little Red Gets a Handle on Old Age,
SARASOTA ARTS REVIEW

Old King Cole Surveys the Current Music Scene,
SARASOTA ARTS REVIEW

Jack Looks Back at a So-So Career,
SARASOTA ARTS REVIEW

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FOREWORD

I doubt if I'm alone in thinking the Mother Goose rhymes have many of the qualities of great poetry: not only is the form perfect for the song, there is also a speech-like quality, a trueness about them that makes them instantly memorable. And strangely, and maybe not so strangely, they are also in tune with the best of our contemporary poetry: they are dark, urgent, unpredictable messages about trying to survive in a world not of the poet's making. A world that wouldn't give a hoot if poetry were led off into the woods and left there. Permanently. But they are even more in tune because no subject is taboo: child abandonment, melancholia, beatings, murder, disobedience, theft, you name it, it's all right up front in smacking bright colors balanced by a courage and resilience and skepticism mirroring that of our best poets.

This homage to the Great Mother began to take shape when some very peculiar drawings of the nursery characters were given to me by a local artist. Let's just say they were peculiar enough to set off a whole new parade of characters bouncing around inside my head like they couldn't wait to get out. And while the little devils were all doing pretty much the same old *schtick*, they were also a bit older now, and a little wiser, a little more hip. Indeed, I had a sense they were trying to report what had happened to them

during the fifty-odd years since we had last kept serious company.

And then it all came to me in a sudden fall: not as rhymes, however, but prose poems: a collection of speech-like, out-of-control, falling-down-the-elevator-shaft raps that somehow revealed both my own colors and those of the nursery characters in a way I could never have predicted. It was as if I were standing in the middle of Mott Street City looking up at the sky and something fell into the palms of my hands that looked like white squares of nougat, the kind with all the little colored jelly pieces stuck in them. They were gorgeous. And peculiar. And nasty. Just what the doctor ordered.

Justin Spring

Merida Yucatan Mexico

2011

THE GIRL WITH A CURL TELLS IT ALL

Listen, two wrongs don't make a right. Well, not exactly, But who cares. Look, they're the same. Really. I know everyone's always telling you bad feels bad, but think about it. Bad feels good. Like eating strawberries, those soft, pimply ones. Or sliding ice-chips down your thigh. Or sitting between the Hubbard twins at the 41 Drive-in. God, they were beautiful. Blue-eyed blondes slicked back like light speed. Then there was the car: '52 *Merc* hardtop just like James Dean's but black, not red, got it?. Want the rest? OK, put up your paws. Bark. OK, OK, take it easy, here's the particulars: Fifteen coats of *Ultra-Midnite* laid on so tight it made you shiver. Chopped, channeled, lowered, louvered. *Offenhausers*. Four-on-the-floor. Black-tint windows you could go naked inside. Hollywood kick-your-ass-low-rumble duals. No chrome, black bad beautiful God-it-was-gorgeous. They had these indigo ultra-violets strung all around inside that made their teeth glow every time they reached across me to get a smoke, and I'd like to tell you my nipples wanted to break off like pencils that's how bad I felt, but they hurt so good, like hot matches melting I didn't care how bad it felt, so right there I made up my mind about a couple of things you should know about. Like *Lucky's*. That's what they smoked. You got it: Red bulls-eye's. They'd light up and all those beautiful blue-white teeth would be

grinning away at me and then they'd ask me the same thing they always did, like they'd rehearsed it, or maybe they were just dumb and it's all they could figure out, they'd say, Maybe you could tell us if we're bothering you? And after that we'd cruise Five Points and side up to anything that looked fast the light would change and I'd feel that fat hog transmission winding out underneath me like I was leaving my organs behind to medical science so now that we've got

some time on our hands, let's talk about those strawberries,
the way they're always so pimply with all these little tiny
white hairs that keep walking down your throat like they're
looking for a seat at the movies

**THE KNAVE OF HEARTS PROVES THE QUEEN
OF HEARTS TRICKIER THAN EVER IMAGINED**

This isn't one of your normal cases of repentance, one of your TV evangelists blubbing into his eyeglasses, Oh Lord Jesus King, and all of that. You know the bit: Do it, get caught, confess it, do it again. This case is stickier. First of all, she never came into the kitchen unless I was there so she could play on my weakness for metaphor. She'd deduced by the continuous articulation of my fingertips on the tabletop that the chambermaid was driving me crazy with her passion for facts: The 11:32 out of Hartford stops at Coscob, three teaspoons to a tablespoon, you know the rest. She was right. I wanted the royal treatment in the worst way. We backed the Mercedes out of the barn, headed for town. For the bright lights. We were doing sixty when all of a sudden she was shoving me out the door like fast food. I hit the dirt running, slid into home head first. The back wheels were waiting. Somewhere there's a catalog on disk brakes I'd like to reference, just to make sure. Backed over me twice, said she didn't feel anything, just something pip-popping like chicken bones, Oh God I can still taste the rubber do it again.

**MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB LOOKS VERY CAREFULLY
AT HER COMPANIONS**

You can develop a following. They'll follow you anywhere; right into the bathroom as they say. Hey, lighten up, it doesn't matter. Whoever is following you, you don't want to know. Think about your first boy friend, that'll be enough. His finger nails for starters. That's right: zero right in. Then think about your husband, the one who keeps asking you for money in your dreams. Correction: demanding it, All of it. Ok, Ok, you keep saying as you pick up the phone, dial 9-1-1. Suddenly the cops are all over you like a bad suit of clothes. You keep your cool, put one foot up on the DA's desk, pick through the remaining fruit in the bowl. There is a mention of murder from the other side of the room. Someone you think you once knew butts in, tells the whole story like you weren't there. There are several disturbing details: Please, only as much as you remember, you keep saying. You point out several mistakes, misspellings, whatever in the transcript. The jury murmurs like leaves. You put your head between your knees, fire your attorney from under the table. The D.A. objects. Now you've got all of them following you. Extrapolate from here if you need more information. After that, try leaving the country. Panama, for example. You can live on the isthmus, count the bodies as they drop.

THE HANSEL MANIFESTO

What you have here is a classic case of your Haves and your Have-nots. Here's how it all starts: OK Up against the wall spread your legs lemme read you your rights. OK, now, listen to me: Straighten up face front then right. No not that way, your right, your right, stupid. We could go on like this but why bother. OK, here's the theory behind it all: the Haves have everything, maybe a little more, which is more than the Have-nots who have nothing but want what the Haves have. And then maybe a little bit more. Expediency is the fermenter in these cases. I'm not moving too fast am I? Good. OK, from here on, substitute Hansel wherever you read Have-nots. Anyway, you can see why the Have-nots kept leaving markers to find their way back, so they could grab a little more before the Haves took them on one of those walks again. Now let's augment that axiom a bit: *Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in, Warren said.* Let's put it this way, time is on your side. Sit quietly and offer a thin stick to any outstretched hand. Don't put your hand near the fire unless you're giving directions to someone else. Always follow the requests of your elders. If you're not sure, ask them to illustrate with examples. Show them you don't harbor grudges. Quick: Shove the bitch in. Harder. Bravo.

**THE WHITE RABBIT EXPLAINS
THE CREATIVE PROCESS**

Listen, Grace Slick got it right: One pill makes you bigger the other makes you small; I mean Jesus, how can you do it without it? You know what I mean: expanding and shrinking to fit everybody's idea of who you are. Like Alice, she likes me big, witty, so here I am yakking away like crazy sticking my thumb in my mouth blowing myself up to keep her happy that crazy little bitch, which is why it's so nice every once in a while to just lay back in the grass and forget about it and watch everyone else get bigger and smaller all by themselves until they all fit in. Exactly like they're supposed to. Finally.

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