

WINTZELL'S COUNTER

by Sandra Beasley

Before we have six seats and a trough of oysters, before J. Oliver slathers the wall in homespun, Charles Peters sells squash here, and canned beans; he sells bed frames & dressers & side tables; he sells insurance against rising waters; he sells whatever will send nine daughters and sons through college. Because in 1891, a black man can build two stories of clapboard for \$2,000, two blocks from the Creole Fire Station's fast horses, those racetrack rejects, because first to arrive on scene gets paid. Because the ghosts have not yet realized they are dying. Fifty-some years later, a merchant marine gives us West Indies by way of Mobile: crab lumped, layered in fine-chopped onion & the kiss of Wesson oil, & the slap of iced water & how God means for salad to be served, on a saltine. This is the last all-wood joint on Dauphin Street. The secret, we'll say, is in the cider vinegar: a hundred jaws of minor angels, macerating the haul.

PHOTO courtesy of Wintzell's Oyster House, Mobile, Alabama.





BILOXI BACON

by Sandra Beasley

If Marc Chagall's father had hauled fish
in Mississippi instead of Vitebsk,
it would be mullet winging over rooftops—
mullet, on violin—rooster and mullet,
mullet and goat. Chagall saw

the wonder of what sustains us: how one
can scavenge the bottom and still
rise, without apology,
by the silvered dozen. In a chapel
of mullet-paned glass we would gather

to watch each fish relay the baton
of its body from wave to wave,
across a marathon of hunger.
The body, fried, cradled in grits.
The body, smoked and lacquered in cane.

When casting nets to the Gulf,
who are we to judge terms of grace?
We save the gizzard, the star-white milt.
The bridal roe, on our tongues,
bursts with the promise of morning. 🍷

Sandra Beasley is the author of three poetry collections: *Count the Waves*, forthcoming in June from W. W. Norton; *Was the Jukebox*; and *Theories of Falling*—as well as a memoir, *Don't Kill the Birthday Girl: Tales from an Allergic Life*. PHOTO by Richard Bickel.