

Transplanting¹

Today I have smuggled three fig cuttings onto a flight from Philadelphia to Detroit. Truth be told, no smuggling has occurred, given as I was carrying the things open and notorious, their roots tucked into some moist compost in a plastic bag. But smuggling makes it sound more thrilling than what it *appears* – carrying a few sticks in a bag – and therefore more like it *is*: carrying living creatures for replanting about seven hundred miles away. Which, you might have already gone there, given as I've told you already they're figs, is another way of saying I'm carrying joy around in my bag. Actually, right now it's in the overhead compartment in that plastic bag probably a little funky with my dirty clothes.

This is one of those delights that keeps piling up, as the fig tree I took these cuttings from, in Stephanie's mother's backyard in Frenchtown, New Jersey, was itself made of a cutting from a grove of figs farther down the Delaware in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, where my friend Jay's family lived and where his father grew a wonderful garden, including bitter melon, Asian pears, peaches, ong choi, and, yes, these figs. When I first asked if I could transplant some of Mr. Lau's figs (he was moving and I was heartbroken that that garden would no longer be a sanctuary to me) he said yes, if he even said that, walked me out to the grove of figs beneath his massive chestnut tree, grabbed a pickax, and started hacking.

I was kind of terrified, green green thumb that I was. (Two ancillary delights – Mr. Lau, old school, OG,² actually got a turtle, drilled a hole in its shell, tied a string to a nut about the hole's size, when he then dropped into that hole, tying the other end of the string to a stick in the middle of his lettuces so that he could have a steady [if coerced] slug patrol. That's not the delight. The delight is that his son, my pal Jay, under cover of night, dislodged the nut from the shell, carried the critter on his bike [one handed, no helmet] to a nearby tributary of Neshaminy Creek, the thing's River Jordan. Ancillary delight two, with a twinge of irony: when people say they have a black thumb, meaning they can't grow anything, I say year, me too, then talk about the abundant garden these black thumbs³ are growing.) Then we stuck the cuttings in a bucket full of water, and he did in fact tell me not to let them dry out.

Yesterday, when I dug up a few of Stephanie's mother's figs, I used a shovel and hacked at the roots like Mr. Lau, though I was sending soothing mindbeams to the tree as I did so (which I'm guessing Mr. Lau was not – ref. aforementioned turtle tale). After I got a few well-rooted cuttings, I took them to the bucket near the hose, filled it up, dropped them in, showered, and dressed for the funeral of a beloved ... [friend] named Rachel who [died] a few nights ago. While Stephanie was telling me over the phone about Rachel's death she said two butterflies alighted on the butterfly bush we had just planted. When we were standing in the back corner of the funeral home during the eulogies – I moved there because I'm tall and called Stephanie over so we could listen together – Stephanie caught sight of a silver gleam on the gray carpet. When the eulogy was over, she picked it up: a single elephant earring. Elephants were Rachel's favorite animal. She adored them.

When we got home, after the pizza and guacamole (my guacamole – a delight. Another delight: here's the recipe: avocado, onion, garlic, salt. Really!), I grabbed the bucket, trimmed the cuttings into sticks, potted them in the plastic bag, and set them on the counter where they sat like promises. Little converters. Little dreamers of coming back into bloom. And how we might carry that with us wherever we go. (*Sep. 15*)

Have you ever carried joy around in a bag? Tell us about it.

Have you ever found delight in transplanting plants or seeds from someone else's garden to yours or vice versa?

Have you had any experiences following a person's death that made you feel that they were still close by and, some would say, were sending you a sign of their love?

Describe a series of delights that you have experienced in an hour, afternoon, or day.

¹ [The Book of Delights](#) by Ross Gay, pp. 34-37, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2019

² <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/og/>

³ Ross Gay is African American.