

issue 8
streetcake



image: edna romero©

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front cover image: edna romero – zantedeschia aethiopica

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Clusters

Doll: I am just a copy > replication domestication nation.

Plastic glass eyed > staring neglect > muted and passive>

Manufacture > makeup > packaged and posted > smooth corners

Homesick: stitches > paper houses and colouring pencils > a long way from 'home'

Conker > remote and returning tired > boots and mudguards > newspapers and kettles

Those long green fields > where we used to play > broken barrows and red buckets

The end of the affair: memories deceive > this is not a cloud > we were once innocent

Contractual > bring our boys home > out damned spot.

Empty dancehall > balloons and coffee spoons > when the music's over > turn out the lights.

ⁱThose long green fields where we used to play.
Do you remember when we were once innocent?
Paper houses and colouring pencils, and then, coming home.

We were once innocent; those long fields like a grandfather.
In the garden, the broken
Barrows and red buckets. Dolls and stories not yet neglected.

Am I just a copy, glass-eyed and staring at the birthday balloons and plastic spoons.
The smell of drawing rooms in the autumn, the close of day, and
The Conker trees would let
Loose their leaves like paper houses.

I am a long way from home, where was childhood.

ⁱ Sometimes a narrative comes from fragments: isolated memories cluster together seeking form.

See-saw

Perhaps it's best for me to not think and to let the words do the running. As soon as I think, I stop. Shackled to the point of paralysis. I can't move the cursor with thought. Thinking shouts me down to the sofa and I watch the news on loop. Machine guns spitting empty promises that rest uneasily in the chests of men. They continue to fall to grow taller and taller, while I fall flat on my face. The news keeps reloading. I flick to another channel, but they're all the same. I want to write, but I'm tied tight to convention.

I see a bald man with his hands in the air. I'm in the crowd watching on. Sweat pours from his head. 'Jesus Jesus!!!' he screams in an American accent. His Italian suit is cut within a millimetre of his body, in between the lord works hard and inside him the devil harder. 'You can be saved, today you can be saved!!!' A queue forms down the two aisles that stretch to the right and left of me. People have come in force to be saved. Outside the building the world waits, while inside the American man hands out armour for lost souls. Tears are flowing down the aisles laying tracks for fingers that tap and backs that will one day bend. 'Yes Jesus, you are great.' The man wipes his brow with a red handkerchief as his gold bracelet winks at me. 'Come sister, the lord has waited too long.' An old lady smiles as she hobbles up four steps to the American man. A band begins to play. The drums thunder, as tambourines shake the dust from the beams of the convention centre. People begin to dance. They sway to the beat. Their hands reaching to the sky. Silver flows from faces and pockets. Men and women have appeared from nowhere with deep green bags that smell of guilt. They glide through the people. The old woman falls backwards, 'In Jesus' name!' Her eyes are closed in hope. She is caught by two young men whose white shirts are pressed to perfection. The American man turns to the band and stamps his feet. They go faster. Music clashes with the cries of the crowd. A faceless woman turns to me. I should know her, but her features are lost in the crowd. 'Go on John.' She wants me to join the lines. She wants me to fall. But the hole I share with everyone refuses to be filled with this. I can't dance this jig.

I know I have something to tell, but the form is killing me. I want to speak for myself, but I'm evasive. Agents are everywhere. They're deep on the inside now. Cameras are already outdated. It's too late to worry about them. It's the inside twist. The programming is perfect and you thought you were you. I want to pin myself down to write myself down, but these fragments are not my own. I'm reaching out for Hemmingway's tip, but it's so cold in the ocean. Give me my own ship and a crew. The laughter in my head is not my own. They don't want us to set sail. But it's too late, the oars are in, will you row?

Mark kept pushing. The woman whose name he couldn't remember moaned. He pushed harder trying to get away from her. She felt him moving faster, so moaned harder. Mark gritted his teeth. He wanted her noise to corrupt his own silence. She gripped him, her nails digging for blood. He wanted the distance of someone who has loved for too long, so he pushed harder. Soon his body began to tremble. She wanted to watch him, but he turned away, his face twisting in an honesty he wanted to hide. He was in that loneliest place where no one else can come. The place where light and dark reflect each other and you disappear from the world. He stifled a moan and got off her.

Mark didn't ask for her number when he left. The woman wanted to give it to him. Outside it was still dark. The earliest blue of day beginning to seep through the sky. Mark sat waiting for a bus and watched the people around him. He played out their days in his head. Some their whole lives. He lay his own on top of theirs, borrowing their futures for his own.

When I cast my mind back it's a sea of darkness. I see my mum rising and falling, her nose pressed to the green glass of a bottle. I roam the space of a father's silence and I turn to my crew, 'lower the anchor.' They look at each other anxiously. 'Please, lower the anchor.' The anchor cuts the black ocean and races for the bottom. Somewhere a small boy and his father scavenge the shoreline with a metal detector. He is looking for something that shines. I look out as far as I can and even if he

doesn't, I know he's already found it. The ship jolts, some of the crew tumble, but I grab for the edge and struggle to keep my balance. The anchor rests and the ship bobs. I stand in the darkness.

'Honey, are you awake?'

Her voice feels far away. But then I start rocking. She's shaking me lightly.

'Wake up baby it's Christmas!'

It's not really Christmas because it's only 1 am and we're supposed to be asleep, but she's too excited to wait.

We wake up Nathan together and although there is nobody else in the flat we're whispering to each other. I don't remember what we're whispering, but the excitement is slipping more than twenty years to get to me and I have a huge smile on my face. We all creep into the front room. The main light is off, but the room is awash with the colour that ripples from the Christmas tree. Green and gold drips from everywhere and taped above the door are three gold bells.

We sneak up on the synthetic tree that bulges underneath with presents and for a moment we all stop and look at each other. Words are meaningless. I hold on tight to the moment...then it slips.

On the bus faces turn away. People look down at nothing, or out of the windows at nothing. A hooded man shelters in a book titled 'The Road', but everywhere else the people find comfort in nothing. Nothing is better than looking in each other's eyes. Mark sits downstairs on the back seat. He is soon joined by a morbidly obese man who chooses the seat next to him crushing him into the corner. He wants to say something, but instead shuffles about until he's found a bearable spot. The obese man senses the silent protest, but doesn't care anymore. Outside London is waking up. Last night's celebrations dragging themselves home. Bodies are wasted, make up has run, jaws are aching. An army of cleaners assembled from around the world scatters the streets. Other people are harder to make out.

The black dots stare at you. Pick a crayon and join them. Any colour will do.

My fear. Nobody wants to look at him, but we all know he's there. Six thousand five hundred and fifty two, six thousand five hundred and fifty three, six thousand five hundred and fifty four. His chest brushes the floor before each press-up. His face is stained with a smile of concentration. He's preparing. He always is. He's getting stronger. I roll the dice and Mickey D kisses his teeth. 12 white dots kill the game and I take my pieces off the board. Six thousand five hundred and fifty five, six thousand five hundred and fifty six, six thousand five hundred and fifty seven. 'Don't look at him John.' I reset the board. 'Another game?' 'Why not?' The man in the corner continues to smile. Six thousand five hundred and fifty eight.

'Raise the anchor.' 'Aye aye captain.' The current is changing. I know I can't dwell too long for fear grows stronger everyday. I must keep moving.

'Excuse me.'

Mark assumed the voice was talking to somebody else.

'Excuse me.'

The voice shook him out of where he was and he turned around.

'Sorry, but is this bus going to Kings Cross?'

Her name was Rachel. When she was a child her dad once invited a midget from the travelling circus over for dinner. Her mum was forever trying to ground her dad, but he was different. It was why she had fallen in love with him in the first place. He had also ridden a penny farthing around town for two weeks to see if he could do it.

People assumed it was for charity and tried to give him money.

In the café Mark tried to study Rachel's face. She smiled and Mark couldn't help but smile back. They were the only customers there. It was still early. Rachel ordered a vegetarian breakfast. Mark ordered a tea.

'Have you ever eaten meat?'

'Yeah loads of times.'

'Why did you stop?'

'Imagine if a load of aliens came to this planet, turned it into one big farm and used us to feed on.'

'It's called capitalism.'

Rachel laughed.

'Oh God you're not one of them are you?'

'Not really.'

I can see myself stood outside another door with my social worker Michelle. I've still got the same plastic bag with my stuff in it. This time she's not crying.

The smell of spaghetti always reminds me of that day. I arrived just before the Hall's sat down for dinner. I was starving. I had to complete a standard social services questionnaire I had also filled out on my first night at the place I had just left. One of the questions was 'What is your favourite food?' This time I wrote 'Spaghetti'. That night after they had eaten I sat at the table and had beans on toast.

Lights were spinning in Mark's room. He rubbed his eyes. It was dark outside. He had slept through the day. Outside the window he could see the fair was open. They had been setting up for two days in the rain. He had watched them from his window.

Mark handed the man in the booth two pounds.

'You sure pal?... you're the only one.'

Mark gave him another two pounds.

'You want to go for twice as long by yourself?'

'No, two for you and two for me.'

'What?!'

'Come on, me and you.'

The man started to think.

'I'm not sure.'

He looked at all the empty cars. It had been years.

The man smashed into the side of Mark. They both burst out laughing. When they finally climbed out of the cars they were in tears. The man's face bright red with whisky and excitement. Between breaths he let slip laughter that almost needed dusting off.

'Thank you son, you don't know how long it's been.'

He put out his hand out to say goodbye, but instead of taking it the man hugged him. In the clench Mark's arms got stuck by his side. He let the man hold him and for a fraction of a second it didn't feel weird, but then the man quickly remembered himself and let go. He started to turn a new shade of red and pressed out one last smile. The awkwardness whispered appreciation more than the man's words. They felt the space between them widening because the world gets in the way like that sometimes.

I had a teacher at school called Miss Lankshear. She took me aside after I had been particularly disruptive in an assembly. I had been laughing and joking, acting the clown. After the assembly all the students filed out through the main double doors. I was almost through when she suddenly dragged me out of the crowd and placed me in a corner. She waited for everybody to disappear. Some kids hung around to laugh and speculate. But after detention threats and kissed teeth they made their ways to lessons I should have been part of.

'Wipe that smile off your face John!'

My smile widened. She crossed her arms and let out a familiar sigh.

'Why must you always act the fool John?'

I shrugged my shoulders, still smiling.

She shook her head and then with her next words wiped the smile off my face and planted a rock in my throat.

'Look John I know what your situation is at home, do you want to talk about it?'

I tried to swallow the rock, but as soon as I did I felt the tears race up the back of my throat, wait a fraction of a second and then fall down my cheeks.

'Oh John what are we going to do with you?'

I felt like the emperor stripped of his clothes. Except I didn't need a crowd. One was enough. As the tears fell I bolted on my anger armour. She stepped forward. I backed away.

'It's ok John, it's ok.'

I wanted to scream back 'it's not fucking ok!' But instead I wiped my face with my sleeve and scowled at her. We stood there for a while in silence and then she said I could go. I started to walk away, but she called after me.

'John.'

I stopped, but didn't turn around to face her.

'I promise it will not always be like this.'

Outside it was bright. The train station was already starting to fill up. Everyone coming and going somewhere. Mark and Rachel stood beneath the departures board looking at each other.

'So...'

'So...'

Rachel took Mark's hand and turned it over. She took a cheap blue biro from her bag. On the back of his hand she wrote her number. She kissed it, turned and disappeared. Mark watched her go without saying goodbye. It didn't cross his mind to think if she would turn around or not.

On the train he spat on the back of his hand and smudged the number off. Nobody sat next to him and he closed his eyes and fell asleep. When he woke up he was pulling into his stop. As he walked up the platform towards the barriers he searched for his travel pass. It was in his wallet. His wallet was gone.

'Fuck!'

Outside now he felt far away from the city. Here everything slowed. The cars slowed. The people slowed. Clouds slowed. The day slowed. He could feel the drag as soon as he stepped out of the station. He walked around the homeless couple and their dog. He noticed they were both still wearing his jumpers.

Everyone has a story, lots of stories. But to tell it is a different thing. Where do you start? What's important? You think of all the worst bits and then all the best bits and then the bit in the middle. The biggest bit blurs. I don't trust my memory, but I have a little red file. Data protection act. I phoned Wandsworth social services and some months later unannounced arrives a red A4 binder containing other people's views about my life. Social workers, foster carers, psychologists, teachers...everyone's got something to say, but I struggle to find my voice. I'm more than halfway through the red file on the top deck of a 126 crawling from Dudley to Birmingham in the rain, when I finally hear me.

'CHILD'S/YOUNG PERSON'S/PARENTS' REPORT FOR REVIEW'

1. HOW HAVE THINGS BEEN DURING THE LAST SIX MONTHS?

(a) *What good things have happened?*

- *I went to Windsor with Jenny's son*
- *I went to Margate and went on a rollercoaster with Jenny*
- *Not going to school because it was summer holidays*
- *Jenny listens*

Memories come crashing in. I'm not ready for them and put up my hood. Upstairs on the bus it's full and the windows are totally steamed up. I'm sat against the window with somebody sitting next to me. I'm sweating from running for the bus and tears are streaming down my face. On that bus I was twenty two. Now thirty I wish I could remember who Jenny was. I continue reading.

(b) *What problems/difficulties/complaints?*

- *I had a bruise when Leonard shook me*
- *Leaving Jenny's and moving to a home*

I wrote these words eighteen years ago. Three weeks ago I found myself looking at Leonard. It was in Croydon train station. I was leaving and he was coming in. I saw

him from a distance. He had short hair now and had put on weight. But he still looked the same. He still had that pureness about him. I always thought of him as a long haired Bruce Lee. He had that way about him. He was strong, assured and always fair. I have hazy recollections of being restrained by him a number of times. I think I was probably restrained more by Leonard than any other worker in that particular children's home and I liked him most of all. I think I just wanted to be held. I look back at that and think maybe in a warped way I should move my first answer from (b) up to (a). Then I would add that as I kicked, swore, spat, scratched, punched and called him every derogatory name under the sun, he held me tighter and always said 'I'm only doing this because I care.' That stuck.

As Mark walked away from the lights of the fairground he thought about calling his brother. He couldn't remember the last time they had spoken. He got as far as reaching for his mobile phone and then let his brother and the thought go. Sometimes nothing is better than something else. He checked his watch. It was already getting late. The sky seemed blacker than usual. It was that time of the year when the darkness seems to saturate everything and the fingertips of the cold get to everything. Mark pulled up his collar and stuck out an arm.

Where to pal?

Six thousand five hundred and sixty one, six thousand five hundred and sixty two, six thousand five hundred and sixty three, six thousand five hundred and sixty four, six thousand five hundred sixty five. 'Don't look at him John.'

For as long as I can remember I always had a bike. The first one was orange and white with stabilizers and a basket. That didn't last long and I soon moved on. The estate was perfect for me and my BMX. We pushed each other to our limits. I reach back and I'm stood tall on the pedals with my new black wheel mags spinning slowly as I cruise along with a 'look at me' face on. The wheels are stolen.

I want to race around the estate, down the curly hill, past the old people's home and finish at the offie with a cry of 'yes!!!' I want to climb the wobbly ladder the builders

have left over the weekend on to the roof and hang drop over the other side. I want to break into the disabled school, jump up and down on their trampoline and run around the empty corridors screaming. Those memories are buried deep, but words can dig. The maps may be incomplete and I may not know exactly what I'm looking for, but I will continue to sail an uncharted course.

Dynamic Cassette

Sing A.

Diction
Flipping the cassette
CD-R
You pronounce it *si di rom*
HIGH

Sing B.

Read-only only
Reel-to-reel-to-reel-to-real
Magnetic tape
Monaural listen Monophonically

Little box is English for cassette only
Duration is low
Music storage
We are
winding you
up

Sing D.

Audio
Compact
Auto-reverse the media

Rainbow books
Burning
Laser

Recording Dynamic glass

Sing G.

TDK, Tt-Dd-Kk
Memory
Sounds like spools
Noise
MB bites
Spinning your
multimedia
It's portable.

Sing X.

It's a stamped
reproduction
Pre-pressed
In pressed plastic
Data red Output yellow

Memo disk
Digital is not

Hi fi books rex Cassette

Track is not disk a tape
Recordable is not rex.

ianna hawkins owen

1809

yellow paints
the sides of your face
edges where
the sun wrights
and reads Mac Low
a thing of beauty
reads Mac Low
and we go
to war with the stairs
waiting for discarded
books in the mail

we can see the
sun that can see
and set over all of
Manhattan at once
at one time
one time
we caught an arm
we caught a man
man swam
upstream
on time
and we saw the sun
past the fridge in
the window
of the New Yorker Hotel room where
i changed my name
it's what you're supposed to do
they expect it
and are angry either way
because of something
about modernism
or sex

.

in the New Yorker Hotel
bones crack
the ascetic wraps
his pink braille back
in cut-off secrets
drinks a glass of water
as the sun goes down
and the way i tell you the sun hits
will reveal everything
about me
and my
psychology.

remember that i love to read out loud
and ask me to read a poem out loud
about the sun
and how i love it
loud
and am so bad
at
it.

ASTRONAUT SISTER

Rain, rain
tickling rain,
purifies and drips,
drips, outside the
cafe window.
I watch legs float
under umbrellas.
I search for blondes
in a blurred,
concrete coloured
crowd,
I search for heads that
remind me of
home, of you.
You own the words
fly away distant moon &

absence

You are the
sum of an extended silence,
the forehead that once
shared the same womb.
Skull to skull we
ruminated
in the liquid
safe from

thoughts and language,
before we snow-rubbed
each others' faces
in the winter fields of
frozen maples,
that anaemic landscape of
the space station
where we said
"Bye butterfly,
hate you."

CURRY – STATE

That time of curry – state love feels
invisible and distant, how we flew on brooms,

flew to worlds of bagel buying Jews,
piss – painted stations and vintage chicks.

What we have now, only lives in this room,
fused in the blue shades of his black skin,

in his cannibal mouth, grunting like the animals of
faraway countries where I'd rather be.

Anywhere would feel
less like a fable than this.

I fall asleep at night and dream
that he has placed an embryo in me,

a foetus with claws,
foetus claws solitude.

When he sleeps, I lift his eye-lids,
read stories in the iris.

It makes me think of X-rated films.
I wrap a blanket around my body.

I feel like when you eat a piece of meat and realize
it once had eyes and feet.

kevin meehan

Poetry is a class thing

Poetry is a class thing

You know
there's a lot of high brow snobbery
surrounding poetry
and all sorts of gab shites banging on
about style and technique
claiming you need to know the difference
between rhyme and meter
couplets, sonnets, odes and dittys
to be in the published poets club

Poetry is a class thing

you can buy a volume of nonsense
from Faber
filled with poets going round the houses
encrypting themselves
instead of calling a spade a spade

in fact book shelves everywhere
are filled with it
reputations and livings are made from it.

which is why poetry that
that has 'literary worth'
or 'touches the soul of humanity'
is deemed to do so,
defined and so preserved
by middle class phony editors
who never did a days work

Poetry is a class thing

write about what you know
be it scratching your arse
picking your nose
or checking if your pricks
still working.

Ode to my prick perhaps?

Poetry is a class thing

what's publishing anyway
but sharing with the wider world
your literary efforts that no one
gives two fucks about.