

issue 16  
streetcake



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(Driving Test)

Tick tock tick, fingers click, fingers on the dashboard, fiddle fiddle, look left quick,  
look right, not a sight, nothing coming right, take your time, time takes time,  
don't worry, nothing coming right, tap tap turn, rubber burn, don't listen to the wheels,  
look out straight, not to him, not to pen scratching paper,  
run for cover with a mouth like sandpaper, hot and dry,  
where the hell's the chewing gum? Don't look away, eyes on the road,  
always on the windscreen, always in the rain now, drip drop drip, hand on stick,  
flicker to the dashboard, clipboard, what about the red ink? Red cross, blood loss,  
feeling rather faint, faint hearted, barely even started on the whole damn thing,  
what to do, where to put my hands, resting on the wheel is a good spot,  
not a lot of hope here, just a word? Not a word, not a single bloody word,  
what's he thinking? Don't speak, can't peek, wind blows, looking out the windows,  
panic grows, how about you just look quick, there's a tick,  
there's a red tick sat right there on the clipboard, flicker to the dashboard, great big grin,  
"could you please pull in here?" let's just think, what to do, how to check the mirror,  
just go slow and you're almost on the brink, one small turn and it's over in a blink,  
stomach ache, hands shake, resting on the wheel, it's your last shot, fingers click,  
feel sick, tick tock tick in the silence, contemplating violence,  
time ticks out and there's no last shout and it's all in the past now, sped along so fast,  
now I hear him exhale, did I pass or did I fail, do I look him in the eye,  
look away and please don't cry out loud in reaction, hold it in a fraction,  
open up the door and put your feet upon the floor, just ignore that pounding in your head,  
try to stand instead...

Eyes open slowly, hazy, feeling slightly lazy, faces looming over and I can't speak,  
feel a little weak, and they're talking all around me and the sky above is bright blue,  
looking new, and a voice from out of view says –

“Well?”

“How’d you do?”

richard barrett

**after The Long Blondes (1)**

My prediction is

something will happen

And soon / spoiling

this boarding-house

This arrangement and

soon will be soon enough

After your day of

work / when you go

where? I will follow you

Will watch the stuff

Whatever / going on

Beyond these drawn

curtains with the air biting

like guilt, sharply

You will know something when

you see it / Me too I think

That's not a child speaking

no / It's a seagull

**after The Long Blondes (2)**

The door shut is  
a hole plugged  
in the wall / This side or  
that they stood  
lay or sat / They listened  
(Later to be asked:  
can I enter? No  
the answer will come)  
with concentration  
With thought, thinking through  
also *past* the door / Of  
rent unpaid for months  
And like matters such as  
what exactly a door is  
Let in the landlady -  
Won't you open this door!  
I don't want to  
Well, I don't either

sarah bradsell

### **These Four Walls**

Finding the right words,  
Is an empty house,  
The feeling of isolation.

Thoughts push through  
The open door,  
Searching for a painting  
Upon the blank walls.

Sitting in a dark room  
With a blown bulb  
I can't turn the light on  
Even if I wanted to.

Ideas become furniture  
With dust covers on,  
The outlines visible,  
Their details - unidentifiable.  
Confined within these four walls,  
I look for inspiration.  
The sofa is a sonnet,  
A pair of book ends -  
Rhyming couplets.  
I look out of the window,  
The ultimate escapism,  
Yet the frame looks more like bars  
In the darkness.

**I Swear**

this morning

you will feel

each individual freckle

sprout

across your cheeks

listen

to cilia beat

against the lungs

like a thick rug

and awake

to swollen balloons

of alveoli

your thick toenails

will claw

against the spin

of the Earth

even your fingers

will only serve

to gingerly probe

the gaping holes

of your skull



**sonnet in compulsions**

o c d o c d o c d o  
c d o c d o c d o c  
c d o c d o c d o c  
o c d o c d o c d o  
o c d o c d o c d o  
c d o c d o c d o c  
c d o c d o c d o c  
o c d o c d o c d o  
d o c d o c d o c d  
d o c d o c d o c d  
d o c d o c d o c d  
d o c d o c d o c d  
d o c d o c d o c d  
d o c d o c d o c d

sarah cuquemelle

### **The Squirrel**

My father used to nickname me his little squirrel. He said I had the same nose, the same long and fluffy hair. I was my daddy's little squirrel, nothing could hurt me, nothing could ever happen to me. I would always be fed nuts and hidden in a tree...

This is what I had thought for years until the day I found pictures of Daddy I had never seen before. On one of them, in sepia colours, a younger and hairier Daddy was proudly grinning at the camera, holding a rifle. Two baby squirrels were lying down at his feet.

jim sheehan

## **A Poet's Disclaimer**

*or What I Write Is Not My Autobiography*

Poets are liars

What I write isn't true.

In poems "I" won't mean me;

and "You" won't mean you.

But

Poets are liars

What I write isn't true.