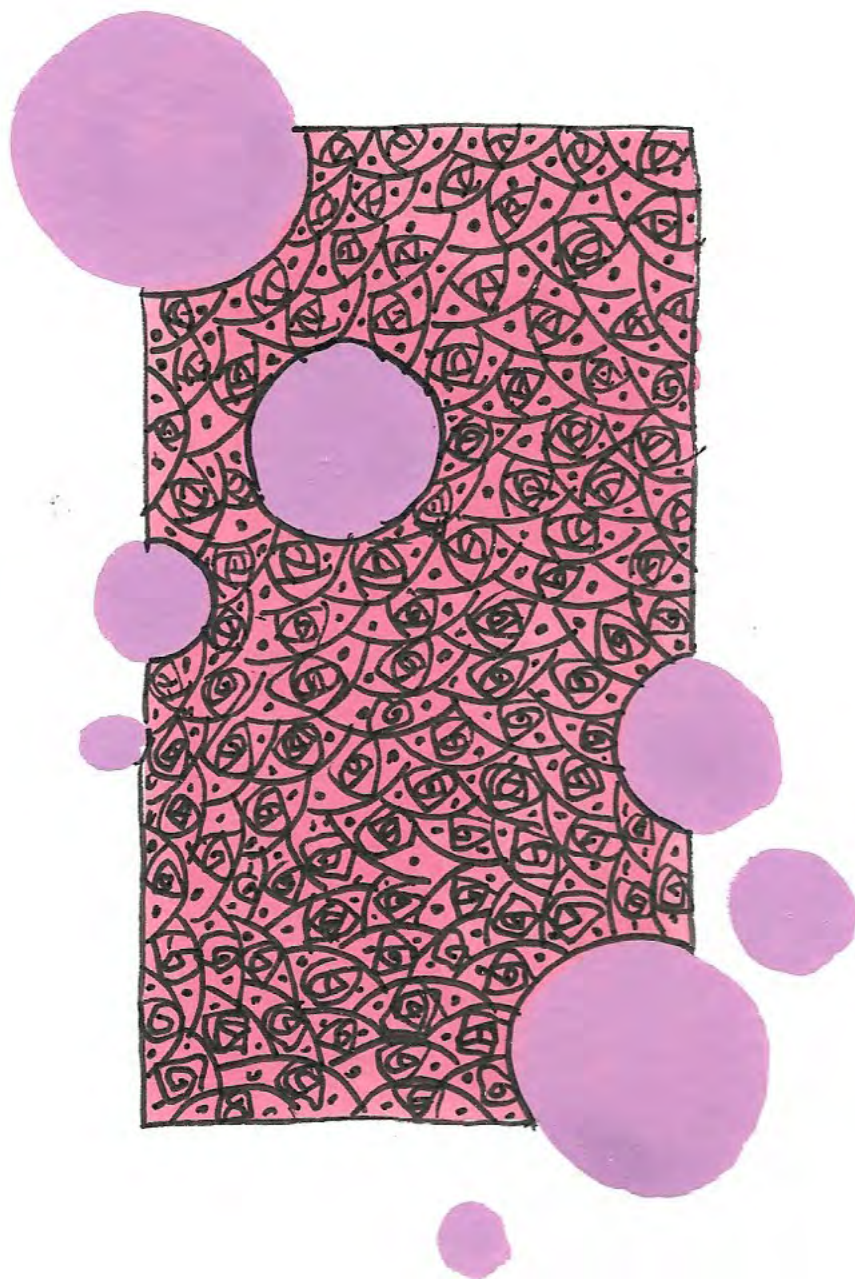


STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 94



contents

issue 94

COVER: stephanie ivanova - oversight

jane ayres - bpm

mark barlex - eighty-nine, ninety-nine redux (now with notes for
non-UK readers)

ian bentwood - the beginning of everything

desmond blume - super beaver moon

mike callaghan - denied

seth crook – v llage goss ps

zoe davis - bravery comes from within (annotated)

salvatore difalco - conflict irresolution

dario roberto dioli - starving

mike ferguson - raindrops

nicky melville – the cost of living

konstantinos papacharalampos - start game

k.h ryan - a straight line

timothy tarkelly - delaware

bpm

make your mark
make it/make it/make it *echo*
resonate
a life
(weighted footprints)
(weathered memories)
lived in layers

on & on & on & on & on &
on/on/on/on
dancing to the heart's rhythm

death is what we write about
kaleidoscopic colours
a flame extinguishing

even when it isn't
faster than you ever imagined
with each measured breath

the body breaks *in whispers*

Eighty-Nine, Ninety-Nine Redux (now with notes for non-UK readers)

Eighty-nine, ninety-nine.

Per hour, plus parking.

No VAT ¹

I'm not registered.²

Don't read anything into that.

So if your doors are sticking ³, I could take them all off and sand the edges.

Or I could just loosen the house.

I could loosen the house.

Yes, the whole house.

All of it.

OK. How to explain. All these big semis ⁴ have a lever ⁵ which loosens them or tightens them up, depending which way it's turned.

They do.

¹ **"No VAT."** Value Added Tax' a 20% levy added to most goods and services in the UK. The third largest source of UK government revenue after Income Tax and National Insurance (source: UK House of Commons library).

² **"I'm not registered."** Only businesses with a turnover of £85,000 or more are required to charge VAT (source: UK Government). Average self-employed income in the UK is £32,000 (Payscale).

³ **"So, if your doors are sticking ..."** UK housing stock is the oldest in Europe, with more than six million homes built before 1919 (Chartered Institute of Housing). Doors that don't shut properly will be the least of this property's issues.

⁴ **"All these big semis ..."** However, the British fetish for the past means so-called 'period properties' attract a market premium, particularly if they retain original features, like fireplaces, ornate cornicing, sash windows ...

⁵ **"... have a lever ..."** ... and secret levers which loosen or tighten an entire house depending which way they're turned. And while this sounds ludicrous, in the context of the enduring British reverence for *ye olde times* – especially the era of the Victorians – it's not unfeasible. Why couldn't a society which invented the gramophone and the flushing toilet devise a method of loosening or tightening a whole house by moving a lever?

They actually do.

Why would I make a joke about that?

Take off and sand all the doors?

At least a fortnight.

The lever?

One hour⁶. Depending how long it takes us to find it.

Eighty-nine, ninety-nine, plus parking.

I'll let you off the VAT.⁷

If you know what I mean.⁸

*

So I'm looking for a lever.

Possibly here under the stairs.

That's the stopcock.

It turns the water on and off.

⁶ **"One hour."** Even so, why is this householder ready to believe such patent claptrap (and would a woman be so naïve?) The answer is he's being cheap. Britons are a generous people and *will* spend money, but not on dull intangibles like house maintenance. On a macro level, this trait is evidenced by the popularity of Do It Yourself projects and the poor state of UK roads. Of course, the householder *could* pay for all the doors to be taken off their hinges, sanded, painted and carefully re-hung. But if there's a lever ...

⁷ **"I'll let you off the VAT."** To be clear, he was never going to charge VAT because he probably didn't have to (*see above*). However, now he's gently allowing the householder to think he's getting a bargain (*see above also*) and bending the law in the process. Which is exciting ...

⁸ **"If you know what I mean."** ... nudge nudge, wink wink, fell off the back of a lorry, guv, honest etc etc ...

No really, it does.⁹

That's the gas main.

Don't touch that.

Can we look in the kitchen?

Wow. Is this all new?¹⁰

How practical are marble worktops?¹¹

Two sinks?

Realistically, how often do you find yourself using both at the same time?¹²

Whatever. I can't see anything in here.

Let's look outside.

*

Ah.

There it is.

On the back of the house.

⁹ **"No really, it does."** A 2018 survey by the Water Regulation Advisory Scheme suggests 82% of people moving into a property don't know where the stopcock is. Emergencies involving water – burst pipes, for example – are made worse by the inability of householders to quickly turn off the mains supply. Also, if there's a magic lever which turns the water off, why shouldn't there be one which loosens or ... etc ...

¹⁰ **"Is this all new?"** It's estimated a new kitchen can add between 5% and 15% to sale price of a house (Chancellors estate agency). However, a property can be devalued by shoddy workmanship or the use of inappropriate materials ...

¹¹ **"How practical are marble worktops?"** ... like marble, which chips or stains the moment you look at it.

¹² **"... using both at the same time?"** Never. Just never. A pointless and uncharacteristic extravagance.

Classic Victorian.¹³

Edwardian?¹⁴

When in 1901?

Sure, he acceded to the throne in January, but he wasn't actually crowned until August.¹⁵

Well I find it interesting.

Eighty-nine, ninety-nine¹⁶, plus ...

Yes, we've started.

Understood.

*

So, I'll move the lever in a clockwise direction and you open and close that door to see if it makes a difference.

What?

Well, I haven't moved it yet.

Because it's stuck.

¹³ "Classic Victorian." 1837 to 1901. The Gilded Age. Hurrah.

¹⁴ "Edwardian?" Wait. What?

¹⁵ "... wasn't actually crowned until August." The UK follows the principle of *rex nunquam moritur*, or *the king never dies*. Whoever is next in line to the throne becomes king or queen the moment the sitting monarch passes away. When Victoria died in January 1901, Edward immediately became king (Edward VII). This is known as *acceding*. Because it takes months and a huge amount of money to stage, the crowning, or *coronation*, happens much later.

¹⁶ "Eighty-nine, ninety-nine." Even with additional constitutional analysis, this still seems like a lot of money for moving a lever from side to side.

Because you never move it, probably.

I'll use this mallet. ¹⁷

Yes, I know what I'm doing. ¹⁸

I'll start with some gentle tapping. ¹⁹

There. It's starting to budge.

A little more.

Here it comes.

I'll give it a whack. ²⁰

A little one.

And a big one for luck.

Does that door still stick?

Yay. Well done us.

Now, you go round the house and check the other ...

Wow. that was loud.

Well, if I had to describe it, I'd say it sounded like lots of heavy things falling a long way onto a hard surface, plus some shouting and some breaking glass.

Yes. Out the front.

¹⁷ **"I'll use this mallet,"** Technically, no-one needs certification or proof of competence to undertake general building work in the UK. Although electricians, gas engineers and plumbers are carefully regulated, most others on site aren't. The Federation of Master Builders supports a licencing scheme which, it says, would remove incompetent and rogue traders from the industry.

¹⁸ **"I know what I'm doing."** I'm sure he thinks so, although research by the Centre For Ageing Better suggests two-thirds of people aged between 50 and 70 worry about the quality of work carried out on their homes ...

¹⁹ **"... gentle tapping."** ... and 44% had had problems with tradespeople in the past ...

²⁰ **"I'll give it a whack."** ... and a third of people in their 50s and 60s trusted tradespeople either 'not very much' or 'not at all' ...

You go first.

I'm right behind you.

Oh.

Will you look at that.

*

So what's happened is the entire front of your house has fallen off.²¹

And some of next door's.²²

Well, as I say, literally everything that was the front of your house is now on the pavement and in the road.

Yes. All the bricks and all the windows.

You wanted loose.

Ha ha.²³

No. Never before.

Not to this extent, anyway.

'Disaster' is an emotive word.²⁴

²¹ " ... **entire front of your house has fallen off.**" ... apparently with good reason.

²² "**And some of next door's.**" Dreadful. He'll actually have to talk to them.

²³ "**Ha ha.**" Lo. The fabled British sense of humour.

²⁴ "**'Disaster' is an emotive word.**" Apart from the neighbours, it's difficult to know who to feel sorry for here. If our friend knew the front of the house could fall off he was negligent (because the front of the house fell off). If he didn't (because he knew houses didn't have levers which ... etc ...) he's a fraud. The householder was being tight-fisted so probably got what he deserved.

Is that your car?

Sorry.

No, I parked over there. ²⁵

Don't read anything into that either.

²⁵ **"I parked over there."** The most sensible thing anyone did today.

The Beginning of Everything

Back in the midst of time....

"Alpha, I need your help."

"What is it now, Dicktion? We've been friends a long time, but I'm busy. My 24 wives need regular feeding. You only have six wives, so it's much easier for you!"

"I've been thinking about our language. I think it's fundamental to our way of life. We should find a way to save it somehow."

"What do you mean, "save" it? We pass it on to our kids by telling them and they copy us. That's enough, isn't it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps things will be forgotten. Not everyone knows as much as us. I think it would be right to put it on something. Look, with this hard stone I can make marks on a soft stone. I think it would be right to somehow record our language on stone."

"So you want to do 'right' on the stone? That's funny! What would you 'right' on the stone?"

"Perhaps I could 'right' the sounds we make. I've been counting them. I think there are 25." I made the sounds one after the other and Alpha counted them for me.

"You've missed one. What about zzzzzzzzzzz!"

"Oh! I hadn't included that sound - okay 26!"

"I bet you'll never be able to do it. I bet you my favourite sheep that you'll never succeed!"

"Okay - you're on!" We shook hands on Alpha's bet that I couldn't 'right' all the sounds in our language.

"I've been thinking about my wives and I have a problem."

"What is it now? How can you have a problem with only six wives?"

"Well, I can never remember whose turn it is. I was thinking about setting up a routine - maybe

see each one every day. Then maybe have one day off and repeat it."

"You are really weak! You only have six wives! Why does it matter if you get the wives out of order? Just see them whenever you want. If you see them like that it will be a weak thing. I thought you were stronger than that!"

"I don't know. Monn is my favourite wife. She is getting very jealous of all my other wives and I'm jealous of all her other husbands. I was thinking of getting rid of all the others and just having one wife."

"Are you crazy! Just one wife! That would be monotony!"

"I don't know - Monn 'n me alone might be special and we could really develop our relationship. At the moment, this is my routine. She is my favourite, so I should start the routine with her. So the first day of my routine I should call that Monn-day. The next day I cannot decide which wife to see, so that is Choose-day. The next day I usually see Wynn, so I guess that is Wynn's day. The next day is usually dry - no rain - that is today - so I thought perhaps Thirst-day. Then I usually see Penny..."

"Oh, Penny, she is REALLY scary! I don't know how you put up with her! She frightens the kids whenever she walks past."

"Yes, she is difficult. I was going to call the next day Penny's day, but perhaps Fright-day would be better."

"I think so. But the day after that you usually sit around and don't do anything - it's your day off, isn't it?"

I looked a bit uncomfortable. I didn't want to explain to Alpha what I did on that day. "Perhaps I should call it Sit - day."

"So what do you do on that day then? Is it illegal?"

"Well I sit and...err...no I don't want to talk about it."

"I think you should call it Sit 'n err day then.!" Alpha laughed at his little joke.

"Okay - Sit 'n err day. Then the next day I spend with my sons, so I guess that should be Son's day. Then I repeat my weak thing, as you call it and see Monn again on Monn day."

"I'm worn out and thirsty from listening to your nonsense! Only one wife, that's crazy!" Alpha lay back on the grass. "I am so thirsty. I could drink the whole sky!" He said, looking up at the blue sky, not a cloud anywhere. No sign of rain. He rolled over on his side and could see Bluebell the cow with her baby calves drinking from her teats. "Your babies are so lucky, Bluebell, with your milk to drink."

"Yes, "Bluebell smiled at him and walked towards him, with the calves following close behind desperate to get some more milk. "That's what mothers do for their babies, provide milk. Your mother did when you were a baby."

Alpha crawled nearer to Bluebell and closely watched her calves drinking. "They really seem to enjoy it. I'm so thirsty, please let me drink some."

"That's appalling, Alpha, Bluebell's milk is only for baby cows not for humans. Go and get your own mother if you want a drink."

"Please, Bluebell, I'm so thirsty. Please let me drink a little." Alpha moved closer and tried to grab one of Bluebell's teats. She tried to move away but her calves were in the way and she couldn't move far before Alpha grabbed hold of her and made to drink from one of her teats.

"Please don't Alpha. If you do that I will never speak to you or any other humans again!"

Alpha grabbed her teat and started sucking. "It's delicious, Dicktion, you should try it!"

"That's disgusting, Alpha! How could you? And you've really upset Bluebell as well and she'll never speak to us again as a result. You are really unpleasant, sometimes!"

Alpha didn't say anything and just laid on his back sucking on Bluebell's teat, looking pleased with himself.

I spent much of the next two days chiselling as I wanted to win Alpha's bet. Then, finally it

was finished. I had used many stones and Alpha came to see my progress.

I showed him the result. “I have chiselled the 26 sounds onto these stones, what do you think?”

Alpha looked at the marks I had made and laughed! “They look like baby lettuces! What are you going to do with all your lettuces now?”

“I can put them together to make word sounds, but I don't really understand the order or structure of our language.”

“Go and talk to grandma. She's the oldest person in the village. Grandma will know how they should go together. Grandma's always correcting our speech, so I guess if you want to get it right, do it according to grandma.”

“I'm really enjoying this challenge of recording our language. I think it's essential for the future of our tribe, our society and everything!”

“You're crazy, Dicktion! It'll never catch on! Why would we want to bother with this right thing when speaking is so much easier? Where would you get all the stones you need anyway?”

“There's numerous stones down Liber way. I could store all my sounds there. I thought maybe I could make a pile of sounds and call it a 'book'. Then I could store all my books down Liber Way for anyone to borrow.”

“Nobody would understand the sounds. You'll have to teach people. Nobody would want to bother learning as it's pointless.”

“Perhaps I could start with the kids. While parents are working I could teach the kids and play with them – give the parents a break as well as keeping an eye on their kids.”

“The kids will not want to do that every day. They prefer playing around. It would be boring to sit in one place and listen to you every day.”

“Yes, I know, So I have a sign to show them where to sit – Some Come Here Only On one day.”

“It's good to have a sign – but do you think they will be interested in coming to S.C.H.O.O.1,

even once? I doubt it will catch on. There's nothing much to teach them.”

“Well, I could start with the lettuces and whatever Grandma suggests, then perhaps show them how to do the 'right' ing and then maybe play with these stones. Look, when they are round like this they roll really well. Perhaps they can kick them into the cave over there.”

“Why not have someone in the cave entrance trying to keep the stone out. You could call him the cave-keeper.”

“Sure, good idea! I tried playing this game with some of the kids the other day and they were so excited they kept bawling. I thought perhaps I should call this round stone thing a bawl.”

“If they are going to kick it with their feet, then perhaps the game should be called feet-bawl.”

I kicked the stone hard towards the cave entrance, but it was badly off target and hit the wall causing sparks which set fire to some leaves.

“Now you've started a fire, you'll get us both in trouble! There's no spare water to put it out!”

“But, Alpha, did you see what happened? When this stone hit the other stone it caused little sparks – perhaps that's how we can start a fire? That would be handy if we could control when and where a fire happens, wouldn't it?”

“What for? The weather here is nice all year round. Why would we want a fire to burn things? It's too dangerous! You're crazy. Just stick to your new career recording sounds from our language. We could name the new job after you and call it a Dicktioner!”

The End.

Super Beaver Moon

in between us there is something
it is not everything of course
 there are other somethings
that you have and I have with others
but this something allows
the doors of fantasy to open
like no something I've had before
 in that space there is want
sloppy and dirty and unconventional
 with you
on your knees with your hands
behind your back
 the past fears
of who will think what of always
constant vigilant judgement rejection
from social circles stained with monogamy
from the opposite of slutty kinky relationships
 suddenly disappear
and we are left just
with this base desire to be mutual sickos
consensually raping and thwarting
the shackles of disney romance
 like two barbed flowers
helping each other bloom
under disgustingly full moonlight



Village Goss ps

ji

bravery comes from within (annotated)

travel earlier than → confidence is a shape that rolls ← incorrect - it is square □

find safe passage through the night ☆ ☆

pinball dank alleyways ? TILT (lol)

where Tom cats sing the blues

meows depressingly → in shades of mismatched wormwood

wear your heart

not on your sleeve < oh, ok

but as gauntlets

meat chambers on each fist → can't draw hands

to beat away those who?

who would scavenge hope opse ✓

and stop you in your tracks end is stronger here.

goss!xx

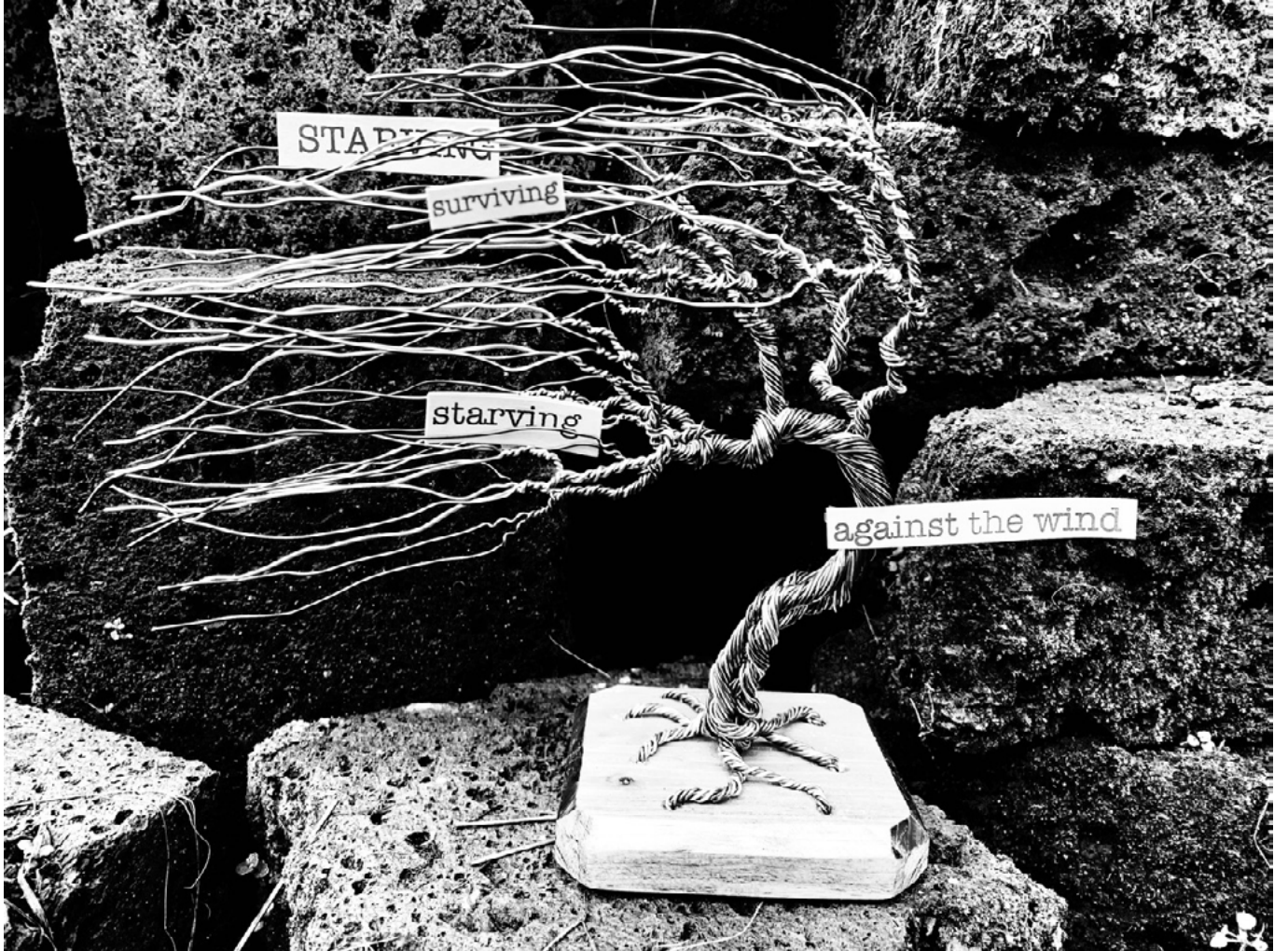
pls clarify which meat

you can't smell colour!!

end is stronger here.

Conflict Irresolution

The outcome made no one happy. The naysayers said it should have never been a thing, that it was a waste of time, that they knew it would be garbage, that no one respected them even when they were right, so what was the point? The keeners argued that the fix was in, that the process was rigged from the outset, that they never had a chance, that they were fools to think it would be fair, so what was the point? A mediator, summoned to quell the bad vibes, told everyone that, on the one hand, forces beyond their reckoning were at work. “There is no one to blame,” he said, “unless we, um, blame ourselves for creating this schism.” Both sides jeered. Nobody liked to be blamed. “On the other hand,” the mediator continued, “we can all admit the truth—that none of us knew what the outcome would, um, be, not even our wisest oracles, seers and soothsayers. Not even the pseudo-haruspex could have predicted this outcome.” All fell silent. Then a voice said, “What now?” Everyone looked at each other. “The, um, pseudo-haruspex?” the mediator said, his voice rising. The silence now grew menacing.



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THE COST OF LIVING

~~FOOD~~

~~FUEL~~

=

FEUD

START GAME:

|

select screen	move across	install future
remove dystopia	install body	remove death
install feelings	remove screen	install utopia



A Straight Line

Each time I cut with scissors, Pythagoras weeps.
Euclid sighs, puts his head in his hands.

The line always deviates from purest intention,
no matter the pencil's angle, the ruler's metal precision.

The journey between two variables is never linear, but look at me,
still trying for exactitude after
all these years of life.

Everything the Amish create has a flaw on purpose.

Only God is perfect, they say.

Yet here I am,

still trying to slice out that perfect square
as my paper shrinks

smaller/

smaller/

smaller.

DELAWARE

Escapes are far more simple
than the staying gone. The body
groans, agog for the sight
of pressed cotton, feathered cushions.
In Kittyhawk, we found that a bed
is in fact a bed, and that kids
can love and swim in the sunrise
wherever the horizon is flat and kind.
Maybe, it's not the lack of comforts,
but their ever-presence,
iced coffees and pristine packaging
waiting at every exit to blow our impulses
into a bright, raging flame of nausea
that won't find it's center until
we leave the car, walk for a while,
breathe air untainted by top-40 tunes
and fast food wrappers. Where are the tents,
the slab cities, and tarpaulin hysterics?
Where did the longing go? Why are we fighting
over prices quoted before the departure?
The car reverses it's course
at midnight, a silent surrender
in the pine-scented dark.
I realize it was us,
the pressure we so eagerly ran away from.