STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 103

@leia butler - 8.46pm

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my curio

the glass fell
broke –

brought anguish.

then, questions
about motive

and why
i chose to let go −

at that precise moment

ENDURING
Can a scientist
Saving
Finding Hope
grandmothers
Riding High
listening
Fantastic Beasts
PLAN AHEAD
THEIR SUMMER
in the Ashes
Two cities
CRITICAL
THE HEART
BALANCE
Coping
The Wolf Within
bring back beavers
the Future
Fatal Attraction
More poop
Life abounds
cradle of the independent
feeling the rush of the wind
Earth
Home
ESSENTIAL
BLACKWATER
obvious moral argument
on your walk.
VALLEY OF DREAMS
Zoomer
Stopping
for All
Sky on Fire
sea mammals are starving
Epic
A mother in Flint, Michigan.
THE simple THINGS...
capacity and reach
Navajo Nation
The Cost

Hangman

for you are dust, and to dust you will return

or you are dust, and to dust you will return

or you re dust, nd to dust you will return

or you r dust, nd to dust you will r turn

or you r dust, d to dust you will r tur

or you r dust, d to dust you ill r tur

or you r dust, d to dust you ll r tur

or you r dust, d to dust you r tur

o you dust, d to dust you tu

o you ust, to ust you tu

o you u t, to u t you tu

o you u , o u you u

y u u , u y u u

u u , u u u

,

In the Dark

Love,
be still
let me hear
your beating core
alight with warm hues,
smooth music, honeygold.
Love, be here with me entwined –
our arms, legs, hot sheets, coal-centred,
sated, confident bloodlove sureness
of our promises languishing fragrant.

I Know You've Seen the Bottom of Yourself

after Kim Hyesoon

but have you ever opened your eyes
and watched the whole world turn red

she says, and naturally I haven't. I make sure
to keep my distance. Think cosmic milkshake,

our shared hands dipped into its ink-black swirl
which is of course a mirror, painting the smear

of our hearts, only for it to turn out we mistook
our own weight for the night sky and tore into

the dark puddle of our chest, and for what—
the naked fact that there are no new doors,

not at this point, only forgotten ones, or ones
that open into a wall, yellow paper depicting

a giant closed zipper.

Dis) located glances.

It's not here. But
decked, performed
little literature peppering
brains. Go figure. Flesh
folded in mountains
which taught proverbs, it
is what

it is. On the narrow avenue
claimed, (as yet—TV sitcom

laughter. What is it?)

A ghost canyon. Or
the last line in a French poem.

I stand inside a cheap phone
stumbling North on its heels
bleeding in the hallway out

of blue. Memories. Anyway.

Senior Premium

There was no romance in Tokyo for her anymore. She'd lived there too long. Amal no longer marveled at the punctuality of the Chuo line; instead she muttered under her breath when it was thirty seconds late or too full of salarymen. She spoke clean, sharp Japanese with a hint of North African cadence and with it ran her own logistics firm and negotiated her apartment lease like a local. She was thirty-five, very independent, and utterly Libyan when it came to hospitality for guests.

Except for lizards.

In Tripoli, a lizard belonged outside ("should be *flung* outside") or under the understanding heel of a male relative. In Tokyo, they were tiny, whip-fast ninjas called *yamori*: literally "house protectors."

During their season she felt besieged. Decidedly *not* safe.

When Kenji had lived with her, she designated him Defense Minister. He would capture the scaly creatures under a plastic cup with the nonchalance of a man raised on anime and nature documentaries and childhood summers spent by the shores of Fukushima. Each prisoner was kept for a moment before they were released into the balcony bushes. But that was then. Now

Kenji was gone, having departed six months ago after a discovery of his affinity for Soapland and the women who worked there.

Last Tuesday Amal had had enough. She'd spotted a beige intruder frozen (believing himself invisible) on her kitchen tile. She had promptly backed out of the front door and sat on the concrete stairs for two hours, waiting for her elderly neighbor, Mrs. Tanaka, to return from shopping. Mrs. Tanaka shooed the reptile away with her umbrella, looking at Amal with a confused, polite smile.

This was the turning point.

Amal flicked on her computer and began to search. By now, Japan was famous for its rental agencies. You could rent a friend to attend a wedding, a father to scold your two-timing husband, or a handsome twenty-something boy to cry with you after a bad day at the office.

Amal rolled her eyes as she scrolled past the page of "Ikemen" options. These young, flawless skinned were useless to her. She looked at their photos (holding puppies, tilting their cute heads) and felt a mild disgust.

"What are you going to do?" Amal muttered at the screen, tapping on one of the faces with a finger. "Whine at it? Apologize to it in a high-pitched voice?"

No. Crises demanded gravity.

She clicked over to the "Ossan Rental" and senior companionship sections. She bypassed the 50-somethings who looked like they still cared about corporate climbing and haircuts. She was looking for the high (old) tier.

Then…she found him. Kenzo. Age: 74.

Kenzo's profile picture showed a man with skin weathered like a baseball glove, proudly thinning hair, and eyes that had seen the weakened yen, three major earthquakes, countless typhoons, and the transition from the Showa to the Reiwa era. He wore a sensible, faded flannel shirt. His listed hobbies were "bonsai, carpentry, and fishing."

Amal grinned as she filled out the booking request form.

Purpose of Rental: She checked the box for *Other*. *Notes:* "No conversation required. No romantic pretense. Must possess high situational awareness, zero fear of reptiles, and a heavy boots. Tea and Libyan meal will be provided upon successful completion of duty."

She hit submit, feeling a wave of profound relief wash over her. Let the young girls have their handsome, weeping boys. Amal had logistical needs. For ten thousand yen an hour plus travel expenses, Kenzo was going to make her apartment safe again.

CLAIM OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby submit

that I was the first
to persuade hydrogen

to become something new.

Not through force.

Through patience.

A little pressure.

A little heat.

A long conversation
between particles
who had spent too long
believing they were alone.

The result:

light.

The result:

life.

The result:

you.

Instructions for Building a Black Hole from Ordinary Household Items

(A practical guide for those who have misplaced something important)

You will need:

one empty jar.

The smaller the better.

The universe has always admired
efficient storage.

Do not worry
if the jar once held jam.

Sweetness and gravity
have more in common
than scientists admit.

Add:

two teaspoons
of invisible weight.

A photograph turned face down.

A name
you stopped saying.

The last message
you never sent.

Do not measure.

Measurement is what happens
when we pretend
the universe belongs
to rulers.

Stir gently.

If the spoon becomes heavier,
that is normal.

If the spoon begins remembering
the hand that held it,

remove it immediately.

Some ingredients
are too sentimental
for collapse.

Now add dust.

Not ordinary dust.

The dust beneath your bed
where forgotten things gather
and practice becoming fossils.

A black hole begins
with accumulation.

Too much matter.

Too much history.

Too many small moments
refusing to disappear.

Add one childhood afternoon.

Any afternoon will do.

Preferably one
where the light entered the room
before you understood
you would miss it.

Fold inward.

This is the difficult step.

The universe dislikes folding.

It prefers

explosions,

branches,

new galaxies
spilling open
like unanswered questions.

But everything eventually learns

the geometry
of becoming smaller.

At this point,

your kitchen may begin
losing its opinions.

The clock may forget
which direction
it was moving.

Your refrigerator may confess
it was once part
of a star.

Please remain calm.

Appliances frequently reveal
their cosmic origins
during advanced stages
of gravity.

Continue compressing.

The table becomes wood.

The wood becomes tree.

The tree becomes sunlight.

The sunlight becomes

a memory
of hydrogen
trying not to be alone.

Stop when the room
has become quiet enough

to hear

the things
you thought were gone.

The black hole is complete
when the following disappear:

the jar,

the recipe,

the spoon,

the person
who began cooking.

Congratulations.

You have created

a place where nothing ends.

A place where every goodbye
is simply matter
waiting for another form.

Do not look inside.

Looking is a kind of gravity.

You may discover

the lost dog
is still running,

the song
is still playing,

the voice
you buried
is still traveling.

You may discover

you were never building
a hole.

You were building

a room

large enough

to hold

everything

you could not keep.

The final report of the Committee on Redacting

Redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted, redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted; redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted was redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted redacted, redacted: redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted, redacted redacted. Redacted redacted redacted. redacted, redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted, redacted. Redacted: redacted redacted redacted redacted redacted.