

streetcake

issue 51



'Sprouting' © Olivier Schopfer

contents – issue 51



cover art – olivier schopfer – sprouting

adam brown – 1010101 declaration

nikki dudley – crossed words

vincent frontero – blood flows through vines

tushar jain - brackets

linda king – photo of troy donahue

mark j. mitchell – ellis street

lachlan walter – back talk

1010101 Declaration

<A=href>

Slipping
Slipped
Sipping the
marrow
from the bones
Results in paralysis

Honeyed/ lies
lead/ to/ the
bitterest/ heartache

<imgsource=Https://moltenlavawithwords

Italic porcelain
Bold Words for a poet

<end>

nikki dudley

CROSSED WORDS

Lost

Lost

Lost

a sea of disjunction.

Words butterflies we

cannot tame.

Glassy eyes swollen and

blind. Deceptively clear, clear

as rubble.

Wait. There. May. Be. Survivors.

Lost (we are

misplaced

absorbed

defeated, now now.

Please do not write in the space below:

(for office purposes only)

Neck is impasse.

Let blood charge

toward the head and

passage,

passage,

passage.

Can't write the way
out of floods. The belly drunk-
the holes, the body
the rising moat.

Words sterile needles,
hope in
to post message too the brain, two
the blood, to the lost.

The announcement:

due to	circumstances	not appearing
today	apologizes	disappointing
please	rest	show

Talk in crosswords.

Put this together, meaning: 3 down, 4 letters:

adj. **1** unable to find the way. **2** bewildered or helpless. **3** (*usu + in*) rapt or absorbed.

Blood Flows Through Vines

We'll meet in the Dressage garden,
To pass notes on side-stepping
poison ivy
as it grows between us.

No second chances ascertained,
Falling leaves get cinched
by the swing
of the gardeners blade.

I hated the look on your fathers face,
there being more love than I could manage—

but
stay with me.

I've searched for hours
on all fours
looking for the tree
with the perfect sized hollow.

I guess such a thing can't exist,
but we can still

dig a hole, build a house,
anywhere will do.

Stay with me,
it's all I have left.

brackets

there

are

[mice]

in the
brackets

(meant

for

the r o d

that holds

up

the

curtain)

there are

four

shaped

like letters

'm', 'c', 'e' –

(the fourth

I do not
know;
my eyes are
sore , blue
with no
s leep)

nextday

I re m o v e

the brackets -itis
am
ista
ke

outside, the mice

seek an adjective

pick

'free'

;

an anagram

run s

through my house

linda king

photo of troy donahue

armed with what you know those stubborn examples viewed from the train wreck
blurred liquidity of all mystery inter-coastal dreary as construction paper birthdays
scroll down to the wrong side of the law you are damaged perfect sticks and stones
everything extraordinary will happen to you a dazzle of adjectives and junkdrawers
you were the daughter in the backyard and the girl on the church steps at midnight
cardboard suitcase filled with the alphabet an extra sweater photo of troy donahue
no version is real that is the vanity of forgiveness you only lament cruel evaluations
you are your own naked child crawling through a language you will never learn

mark j. mitchell

ELLIS STREET

Roy's left hand dangles over Ellis Street.
His cigarette glows soft as a brake light
while late evening becomes early night.
The only music a lunatic shriek
from a tired bus. Neon crackles outside
and stiff voices argue next to the closed
post office station—its only window's
still cracked. He exhales smoke through the good side
of his face. Pearl's the devil's true daughter,
he thinks, or some fisherman's ex-wife.
Coughing, he remembers her cold laughter—
it's threaded through his dreams—a leitmotif
composed of broken glass and cracked shutters
and lost salt air blown off an unreal reef.

BACK TALK

I crouch and look through the keyhole at a dimly lit office. Two silhouettes stand on the far side, just blurry shadows thanks to the streetlight right outside the window. I squint. It could be the robo-dame and her latest John, but it's hard to tell.

Then again, who else could it be?

I stand up. I take off my hat, using it to cover my fist. With my other hand, I pull out my gun, a snub-nosed .45. I punch through the glass-door and stride into the office, my buttoned-up overcoat protecting me from any stray shards.

“Hold it right there, Joanie. Big Bill wants a word.”

I cock the gun for emphasis. The John flicks the light on, as I was hoping he would. The poor schnook, he's probably never been more confused.

“What's going on?” he asks, right on cue.

“Tell him, Joanie.”

She looks at me with a hate so pure that it has to be more than just programming. I wave the gun up and down; she's a knockout, there's no doubt about that. Whoever made her sure knew what they were doing.

I have to stop. I reckon this whole story needs a rethink. Do I want a coffee to kick the process along? Yeah, I reckon I do – a coffee out in the sun is as good an excuse as any to step away.

I wander around the garden while I drink my drink. It's bloody dry out here. I'll have to water later. No matter how hard I try, I can't stop thinking about the story. But I guess that's the point.

Third-person, that'll fix it!

Okay, here we go: He crouches and looks through the keyhole. But hang on, he needs a name. Something tough and detective-ish.

Right...

Jack Steel crouches and looks through the keyhole at a dimly lit office. Two silhouettes stand on the far side, just blurry shadows thanks to the streetlight right outside the window. He squints. It could be the robo-dame and her latest John, but it's hard to tell.

Ugh, I'm still not feeling it. I need some inspiration, and caffeine isn't cutting it. I go for a walk and then take the dogs to the park, but lightning doesn't strike. A thought: I've got a little bit of pot left from that party a few weeks ago, maybe that's the go.

I'm in the hammock. I'm a bit stoned. I think I've got it. I return to my computer.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Who said that?

"I did."

I look around but there's no-one else here.

"Of course there's not, but you already know that."

Who?

"It's Jack. Jack Steel."

How?

"Before I get into that, let me just ask you something. Could you have cared less about naming me? I might as well be Tom Tough or Billy Brusier or some such."

"I was on the spot."

"You were being lazy, Lachlan. And now I'm stuck with it."

"I could always change it."

"But you won't, because my name isn't the point. Face it, we both know that's true – I know everything you know, and vice versa."

I can't believe I'm having this conversation.

"You're not. You're writing a story about me talking to you."

Am I coming down with something? Or was that pot like old wine that just gets more potent with age?

"Hold it, stop right there!"

I can't believe that my own character cut me off.

"I didn't. You did, for cheap dramatic effect. Anyway, don't go trying to blame this on something that you haven't done."

"Sorry?"

“Don’t give me that. We both know that in your search for inspiration you didn’t go for a walk, or take the dogs to the park, or lie in the hammock and smoke a joint. Speaking of which – this drug talk makes me think that you might be foreshadowing one of those ‘it was only a dream’ endings. You know, ‘and then I woke up’ etc. etc.”

Guilty as charged. But still, I try and look innocent.

“You can’t fool me, remember? And you should know better than that, Lachlan – you can sometimes get away with being lazy once, but not twice.”

I’ve had enough.

“It’s my story, I’ll end it however I want.”

“You got me there – there’s nothing I can do to stop you. But think about it: Isn’t an earned ending better than a forced ending?”

“Um?”

“Maybe that’s a question for another day.”

“Look, Jack.”

“You just saw me tense-up, didn’t you?”

I can’t lie to myself.

“Yep, I did.”

“You see – even you’re embarrassed by such a cheesy name.”

“Sorry.”

“No sweat. Like I said, it’s not the point.”

“How so?”

“Well, duh – the story’s the point.”

“The story about *you* talking to *me*, right?”

“That’s the one.”

I need to pull him up here. But I also need to pee. I’ll write the words in my head while I do my business.

I’m back.

“That’s not what the story’s about, Jack.”

“Really? Go on, then.”

“Well, I watched *Bladerunner* again last night, for the first time in twenty years or so. And the idea for a kind-of sci-fi noir thing just popped into my head.”

“Bullshit.”

“I beg your pardon?”

This time I can hear him split the word in two, and so that’s what he does.

“Bull-shit. They’re just more lies, Lachlan. Why bother?”

I’m going to deflect.

“How dare you talk to me like that?”

“I’m not. You’re talking to yourself like that. Jesus, for a reasonably clever guy you’re a bit slow sometimes.”

“Sorry?”

“I’m just the messenger.”

“What?”

“You created me for a reason and invested me with a role, and so I’m only doing what you make me do.”

I think I’m catching on.

“You are, and stop that – it’s a bad habit. So, more lies, like we were saying. Which brings us back to my very first question: What do you think you’re doing?”

I obviously know what I’m trying to do. But I also know Jack. I created him, after all, and if I want him to be a character that likes having his ego stroked, then that’s what he’ll be.

And so I answer his question with a tentative question of my own, as if I need his affirmation.

“Trying to write a meta-fictional story?”

“Very good, Lachlan.”

You see how proud he is?

“Why do you want to write a meta-fictional story?”

A question I didn’t expect! Okay, here we go.

“Because I found an online journal looking for short meta-fictional stories, and I’ve always wanted to write one.”

“Well done. But I have another question before we go: How short are these stories supposed to be?”

“I can’t quite remember, but I can check.”

“Don’t bother – we don’t want this thing to drag on too long anyway. And so we’d get a wriggle on.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Yes, you do – you know that we’ve got a little more ground to cover, and that you’ll probably bump-up your word count after a couple of edits.”

He’s got me there.

“Lachlan?”

Why am I prompting myself? Why am I delaying? I have to think about it. Thinking, thinking, thinking. This time, I’m actually looking at the garden while I write and think – I’m in the shed, with the door open, as there’s no actual shade in this backyard.

I find the answer: I don’t want to jinx myself by saying it out loud.

“Don’t be silly.”

“Come on, Jack. You know that that’s the truth.”

“And I’m not disagreeing with you about that bit. I just think that your ‘truth’ is silly.”

“Thanks for the support.”

“I am what I am – that’s how you write me.”

“Fair enough.”

“So, come on, out with it.”

“I’ve... Um, I’ve got this idea for a long-form piece of meta-fiction, about characters and fiction vs. reality, all wrapped up in this cool sci-fi device. Um...”

“Get on with it, we’re running low on words here. And don’t think about it too much – that way lies a rabbit-hole...”

“Nice one.”

“It doesn’t sit well when you congratulate yourself on appropriating a phrase, dickhead.”

“Sorry.”

“You’re not going to keep that there, are you?”

“I am. It’s good for the reader to witness the writer chastising themselves.”

“Whatever you say. Now, can we continue?”

“Okay, okay.”

“Wouldn’t one ‘okay’ have been enough? It’d save you another word.”

“Wouldn’t you shutting up save me more?”

“Really? Look, Lachlan – stop being silly, okay?”

I just chastised myself again. I hope you’re enjoying this.

“As I was saying, I’ve always wanted to try writing a meta-fictional story, and I think my idea is exactly what I’ve been waiting for. But I needed to experiment with a few ideas first, and you know me – I’m hopeless at just writing for no reason. And then I found that online journal and ta-da: Two birds, one stone.”

“I get it,” Jack finally says.

“Does that mean that we’re done?”

“Yep.”