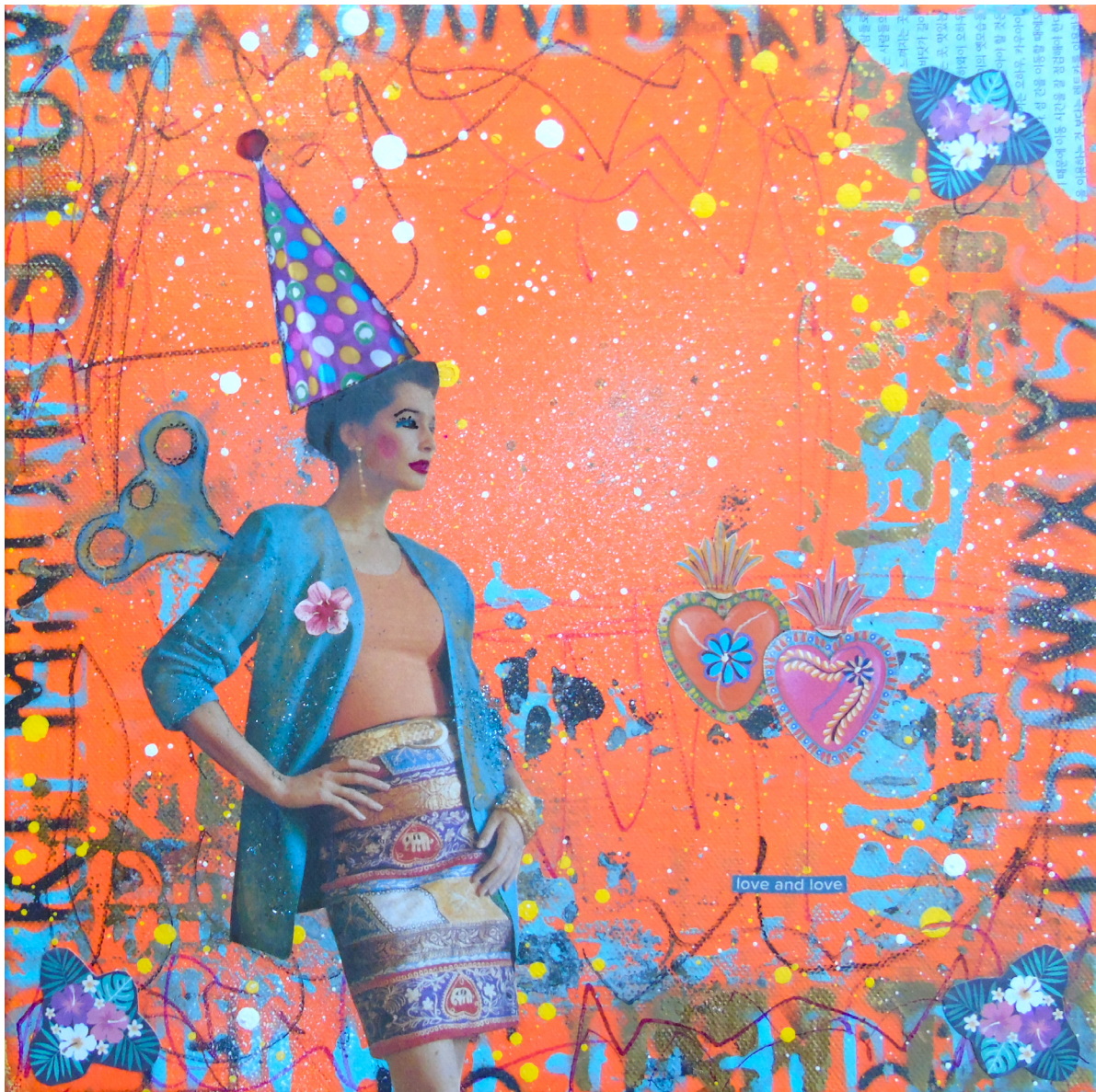


# STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

## issue 70

### part 2



@lorette c. luzajic – love and love

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## issue 70

### part 2

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## A Gentling Progression

### *Part I: Broken Heart*

Despite your best efforts, these things remain:  
the musk of his skin on your pillows,  
the light where you touched that still  
stings; the crack in your mask  
you cannot hide, even  
from yourself. It  
grows with each  
passing  
day.

### *Part II: Waiting Game*

You sip the rum-laced coffee, let it  
burn your throat. Lip gloss sticks to the  
corner of your lips like a  
bloody smear. Under your  
shoes, cigarettes line  
the street. You wish  
you knew if  
he was  
safe.

### *Part III: Moment of Truth*

When you meet again, there's no thunder  
in your heartbeat or fire to your  
blood. There is only the calm.  
Now, you smile because you  
understand the space  
between. Why it  
has to be.  
You let  
go.

## Bathtime

Wrinkle my toes on the scorching pillar taps. Air tunnels in between and touches my skin. From the deep, they emerge as periscopes atop a submarine. The lapping sounds of a warm Pacific lagoon. I fold in my legs. Mum's exfoliating sponge and pumice stones, the coral reef beneath my childish feet. The candyfloss consistency of bubble bath, rising high, like islands above my knees. The atoll rings of the soap film thin around my thighs. Mum returns, towel in hand, fresh from the airing cupboard; spiderman PJ's folded, awaiting my sleep.

The amber-checked navy *Matey* bottle falls in, more bubbles, but it "really is bedtime," the girls are already in bed; kindergarten's early tomorrow, Mrs Henderson's expecting me to be sweet. My *Playmobil* boat capsizes as I lift and land on the coconut husk carpet, the buoyancy of the bathwater folds and tilts.

I remember so little now, not due to the passing years, but because I internalize moods, not images, nor scenes. I absorbed Mum's tenderness; her love enveloped me as a beach towel after a satisfactory swim.

It's the end of the summer holidays and what little I have done, but moon over boys in their packs at Southend beach. The bathroom window, diamond panes remain cracked, unfixed after the storm in 1987, or was it the one that followed, in 1990, the 'Great Storm',



not a hurricane. I'm soaking, it's my usual Sunday evening treat. Better than *Songs of Praise*, *Howard's Way* and *Heartbeat*. God, how does Mum watch that stuff? I prefer the glitz of *Dynasty*, Joan Collins and Crystal, the Colby's, shoulder pads, the sweaty allure of wrestler Bret the Hitman Hart in his spandex.

Mum indulges my love of hour-long baths. They're my weekly visits to *Mizz*, *Just Seventeen* and my sisters' 'girly magazines'. My pleasures are weird; reading my multi-coloured parent information pack, anticipating a term of tests and new teachers, who - I hope - will shower me with praise. I might glow like a basted chicken, rotating on a spit.

The 1990s were cast. A recession corroded the house, I was mostly aware through Mum's reminders, "at a new school, you'll make plenty of new friends." We still had the same avocado lay-down walk-in tub, a stained mirror, matching avocado tiles and a crack that invited whistling winds.

In that bath, I mourned my dog, Ben, who was blind and, at the end, capable only on two feet. The rhythms were mostly sea-shell echoes, of past summer vacations - again misspent. The distant whirr of traffic heading up the hill to Junction 24 of the M25, and I like to reminisce, hints of faraway lands. At the very least, the other side of the Green Belt, through the dust-lined extractor fan. The perceptible buzz of London, its theatres and the Natural History Museum's T-Rex.

Exploring another part of me, the bathroom door locked. I'd take forbidden desires into that basin, soak myself in them and repeat, "I must have a girlfriend by the time I'm eighteen, this will all have to end." A newspaper photo of Michael Owen, Liverpool's new 'boy wonder', was a handy prop.

Then we mourned Mum, in that same house, Dad only fifty-four and me approaching my A-Levels, not 'out'. Baths were necessary chamber halls, as I heaved and let rip with new sounds. The door needn't be locked, no one was around, not very much. I still retreated there, *Radox* poured, the emerald green of adulthood. Fewer bubbles, set texts for uni; the lonesome morning song of tits and faraway tractors, lawnmowers, closing doors.

Was there more we could have done to save Mum? Why did we mistake her symptoms for signs of the Menopause? I'd secretly bathe in my parents' en-suite - Dad was at work - and metres away from where we watched Mum, nursed her, crawled into her reach when nightmares woke us as little things, I'd curse, determine 'what rotten luck'.

Baths were changed, not there, but we moved beyond; a breach, but the romance intact.

An early holiday, all four of us, in *Sestri Levante* not long after the 9/11 attacks. I lie in the hotel bath, read Fukuyama's *The End of History*, which seems far-fetched. We have to cope. I do. Baths help: mint shampoo washes my hair, my navel is my compass. I look inward, let the volcano of repressed teenage desires erupt.

Vintage and retro baths, sit-down ones that see my knees kiss my ears in Japan. Fancier they get, and shared in cases, but that's silly, a gesture of intimacy, when I crave their silence and absence of touch. I prefer their embrace, a man's can wait. I am craven, cancel dates, and find lazy gratification in a bath's confession booth instead. Hours can pass. I've slept in them, texted in them, even eaten in them, well, biscuits and potato chips.

Mum would occasionally take a bath, but Dad comments, "why would I choose to lie in my dirt?" They recycle, tumble dry, restore, deliver me baby fresh. I'm transported back to being a tot, shrieks of laughter, warmed green grape flannels, dressing gowns and *Dennis The Menace* slippers neatly prepared above the corkboard-topped chest. Mum's unconditional trust, her easy smile as she leans over. The space she first affords me; later, no distance between us when, my feet on her's, we hug, wishing each other "good night".

Who lies in my childhood bath now, do they care for it as much as I did? Does it offer the sanctuary of masturbatory thrills, the swampy savannah-like conditions when dipped into on a baking summer night? Is it polished, does it exist at all, or has it made way for a cot? A new child born, doted on, helpless in imagining life continues at this pace?

**morning in the quiet house**

this is still your story   the diffused language   the slow images  
the dots unconnected   all of it open to interpretation  
your histories are falling out of favour  
all the fences lean inward  
the sea is rising over  
the breakwater

add pale music  
pale as bone



shuttered



**The walk** exercises**Imagine you take a walk**

by yourself one step and  
 then another  
 a black car  
 a squirrel  
 happy looking z I n n l a s  
 a gentleman nods  
 you keep on  
 are you lost?

**But you skirted the walk**

    circling  
 the pulsing of the thing  
 bending over to catch a glimpse  
     to be spit upon  
 and then you cleaned up nicely

**i d r e a m t i w a l k e d.**

    h  
     e  
     cloudswereroads.  
     cloudswereroads.  
     cloudswereroads.

## Porcelain

I make blood            from pieces  
    of the        world  
    then I make  
        blood  
            for you  
    haloed  
            of our bones  
porcelain  
    it        flows        out  
                 slowly  
I    watch  
        the    dust  
                 tide  
    towards  
            the sun  
the  
    metamorphosis  
        of  
    reality  
falling  
                 away

## Transl8ing and Upd8ting Sh8spEaR

DIS kingdm, DIS gr8 Erf,  
 DIS paradise, DIS 4tress dat natuR Blt  
 2 protek hrslf agnst DCz & war,

DIS 3 race of ppls, DIS ltl world,  
 DIS precious gem  
 of an iIe sitN n d c—which proteks it Like a wall  
 or a moat agAnst d intentions of less 4tun8s  
 —this blessed land,  
 did brex8,  
 Dis demonst8  
 Dis H8  
 DIS ngland,



## Hibernal Solstice, Soundscape

crow cawwwwiinnnndsurge ----- break  
 susurrat on canopy  
 of the last remaining leaves  
 treecreeakkk, treecreeeeeakk squirrel-claw-scuttle  
 uptrunk, fine ivy rustle tch tchh tch tch tchh tch  
 sharpening knives of a sweet flag sedge  
 conifer shearing flowwwwooooooooosh ----- lake run of  
 f  
 ff fff ff fff ff drake-waaak kwaak kwakk  
 finchy chirupp rupp ruppp, lop lop drip  
 p  
 pip  
 ipp  
 low cloud to branch to pine needled floor  
 fall of spring water on fern, rock, mudstone  
 shish ish ishh ish ishh ish ishh ish ishh ish  
 bullrush sibilance  
 coot krp krpp krp krpp  
 mouthless wordless crow cawwwwcaw clack  
 clack

The Breeding Habits of Moths

moths  
 size of my thumb  
 autumn terror trailing  
 powder wings generate unease  
 little bones cold snap clicking *shit*,  
*who left bedroom light on?* death panic  
 morse code *taptaptap* uncanny blimp on  
 speed *frantic soul seeks warm body* HELP ME!  
 this year they did not come eerie pause  
 on moth activity something wrong *sshhhhh...*  
 things go missing

## Positive

i)

She gets on the number 14, finds a seat near the window. The glass is fudged. She feels her way towards the stop; bends in the road, counting backwards. She presses the bell. The connection is faulty. The bus sways on. She gets out at the next stop and walks the extra fifteen minutes back across town. She adds on a street. She crosses roads. She meanders. The light changes. She pulls up her collar. A sign outside the George and Dragon advertises bands. She doesn't stop to read it. The bands will have names like Mickey Dee or Midge and the Moon. There is an upturned pint glass on the railings, a crisp packet flapping at the wall. She turns the corner, scuffs her boot-toe on the curb, reaches into her backpack for the keys.

It is there, under the freeads, the QuickMart flyer, static against the nylon fibres of the orange doormat.

ii)

She gets on the 17.38. There are no seats. She puts her bag on the floor, pincers it between calves. Anchors herself against the handrail, against the ebb and flow. The train empties. When she arrives it is dark. She crosses roads. She meanders. She fishes gloves from her pockets, wrinkles in fingers. A sign outside the George and Dragon advertises a club night, DJs with names like Mick E Dee and MC Moon. She turns the corner. At the door she taps in numbers, ducks her head passing the mail slots.

It is there, between the metal ridges, blue-inked franking throbbing like a vein.

iii)

She doesn't go out.

She waits on the sofa, staring out of the window until the sun sets.

There is no point in going anywhere. The tiny light pulses whether she looks at it or not. Yes, even in her pocket.

Baudelaire, Les Fenêtres

A window                      open  
    fertile  
    mysterious

but what we see

by candlelight (delights?) what can we see derrière une vitre      deep in that  
 dark luminous hole (trou noir ou lumineux.)      [We have to assume here  
 that window=l'hymen.]

This is where we find life.                      [Which sounds horribly awkward in  
 English.]

Better to re-write Baudelaire here:  
 The body only exists in the dark.

This is a problem of illumination.  
    The body illuminated/illuminates desire. [We can't escape this.]

[The poem is a sound test] [A deconstruction of the idea of sight as that which  
 allows us to map the boundaries of the other.]      And all that leaks  
 through.

You can almost hear the sexual machinery humming.

[Clearly, what he is really asking is, how does language create the body. Or is  
 the body a creation of language.] Think Hegel.

Across the waves of roofs                      a woman

Out of her face (avec son visage, [                      ] avec presque rien) out of almost  
 nothing  
 I create her.                      She is there. Or [he asks] Does she only exist within him.

Maybe woman is always a half-finished sentence.

I could go on, but I think at this point it's easier to say that what Baudelaire  
 really wants is to swallow her whole.



## An Erasure Fable About Eating 75, and Surpassing 1000 Career Hot Dogs and Buns

*(from the 2020 Nathan's July 4<sup>th</sup> Hot Dog Eating Contest introduction for Joey Chestnut, by George Shea, MC and Co-Founder of Major League Eating)*

full emptiness is a path  
 of certainty a sea stands always  
 onward carry  
 the cause the earth is dust and stone the last echo of dry  
 time for the champion of the world

MORAL: The rock stands not a rock it is the United States of America

# He stands up to ask his question

(arr. for *Tenor* and SSAATTBB)

*Tenor* Solo

I haven't really formulated the question in my mind *ff* but what I'm understanding is that your interpretation

Choir

(if you want to call it that) of this situation is that (to paraphrase)  
(at this moment in time) (if you'll allow me)

the central point of contention is one that affects everybody. (Am I getting that right?) (I don't want to step  
(Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong) on anyone's toes here.)

but the way to go about solving this (whatever that may be)  
could be not to think of this as a problem in the communal sense

(I realise now that this is less of a (what a cliché!) *Unison*  
question but more of a comment) (forced pause) *fff*  
*Unison* (forced laughter) *p*

(Still, I've committed myself to it now) (but I'll catch myself (Now,  
(so I'd better see it all the way through) next time.) where was I?)

*Repeat until fade*

## Ashes

Everyone wants to know what I did  
the night we finished this long  
and ridiculous business  
of getting your body into the ground .  
My mother with her plastic beads .  
My husband with his husband's concern .

I packed up the car and drove through the night  
under a moon rising overhead  
that they tell me wasn't .

I remember it above the clouds and motorway lights ,  
the woods behind pylons soaked in darkness  
and my headlights ripping through the darkness  
and inside the ripping I was untouchable -

stripped back to the bone by a moon  
quiet as a mirror , full as the thumbprints  
I left around your wrists at the end .

Outside the car I could smell smoke -

if some god wanted to set me on fire , let them .  
I knew , by the thirst in my bones  
for the damp woods , for cold soil ,  
I would exist , still .

What did I have to fear in death ?  
If some god , or my mother , or any man wanted me  
stripped to a pulsing , sea-urchin soul I would laugh -  
I would show them the moon

that was blue as a gas flame ,  
that was a gold smear ,  
that was and wasn't there .

If they wanted to have a proper talk about things  
I would sit my body down at the kitchen table  
and show them the pulse in my wrists that keeps saying I am .

What happens to the rest of my body is not my concern ,  
if they wanted me made into one long bone of pain  
I would let them , happily !

With one eye trained on the indelible moon  
I would tell them to come , strip me .  
Make it sore . Make it burn .