

STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 74 part 2



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issue 74

part 2

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POEM

When I'm asleep, my bones unzip my skin and walk the neighborhood, talk to racoons, and stare at the moon like a broken alarm clock.

A hairdresser with a million-dollar debt continues to instigate fights with me.

If a human skeleton has 206 bones, why do I feel like I'm moving 350 different ways at once?

Here, now, I see the rat calculating its next meal with an abacus and a piece of blue chalk.

The moon is full. I wear it on my earlobe. The last day I eat will be a vast, hypnotic event.

Don't do that, the mothers say. Don't talk like that.

I understand, but there are just so many villains standing behind me. I'm surveilled by an infantry of birthday candles standing parade rest on my favorite birthday cake.

I cannot make sense of this.

Silk oaks huddle together, their sadness, communicative and gesticular. I'm alert with empire expansion. My tiny living expense is an eyelash on the war beast of capital.

Consider this, the mothers say, their bare knuckles extended for a kiss. It's only right to love in the midst of a pandemic.

I assume the un-assumed. And for that my eyes are always anticipating. Some say I look nervous, shifty-eyed. I track the sorrow of a mercurial shadow. There are too many mouths to feed with a finite glossary, so I dribble an alphabetic discharge and circumscribe the wilderness outside my window with a metaphor.

But why, say the mothers. Why do you think that way? Is there something we can do for you?

Lasso my rancor with dental floss, I tell them, as a mother approves listlessly from a Jacaranda dropping its color in the breeze.

My legs are skeletal. I've plagiarized the x-ray machine with a pack of matchsticks and a flashlight.

Kerosene is my pleasure. My hands growl in the sunlight. When I fly, resurrect my heart with a blue crayon rolled up into your shirt sleeve.

Affordability is a cruel sentiment.

I danced like a lifeguard in charge of the public swimming pool.

Don't move like that. You'll drop the plate, the candle, the vigil.

To expunge laughter is transcendent and liberatory. Stretch your face and laugh. Imagine your favorite city stretched in laughter.

But I live in the desert. I can only grow orchids on the windowsill of my mind.

How many dolls do I drive on my yellow school bus. When I grieve, the strip mall dollar store sells out of plastic raincoats.

I grew up on top of a flagpole. I standardized the wind so my fake moustache could redirect planes to heaven.

Stop talking like that, mijo.

I drank my second bottle of wine. These lines are guilty of trafficking with tannins.

There are tarantulas climbing on the ceiling of my skull. They carry spray paint, and archive the horrors of memory with an orange Krylon mist.

The morning is grey. **O azul.** *I can't decide!*

La mañana

is today.

Is you..
In every
dimension./

No matter

how far

You are the meaning./ **You are the answer./**

Never a question/

T o d a y w e w a l k t h r o u g h
memories **together.** *en esos que aún no creamos/*

Through the ones *we made up*
ourselves./

Days and **nights** and morning filled with **words/**

t h a t l e a v e
and don't return,

que se quedan y se guardan/

Those words **never going to leave us.**

We won't let
them go.

La tarde eres tu. *The evening that is here to stay.*

And the memory of you, painted blue
eres océano, eres mar/And I, from afar, feel the sand beneath my feet, washed away by the sea, to keep looking for you./

para que nunca deje de soñarte.

En las noches **(every night)** a



I travel the distance

in my dreams/

With only two words/

I'm here to stay/

**beneath the waves, across the sea/
y poder vivir en tu recuerdo.**

The Aging of Dandelions

This other place / scratched glaciers
darkness / trenching comets / clematis
this siren's tongue / of lapis lazuli
this moon / glimmering / ash
vestiges / of / bronze
star / meshes / within
the aging / of / dandelions
this note / could be a note / if it was
burnt nostalgia / scrolled with rope
written / in jasmine / alchemy / you turn
promises / three times / for fortune
before / loosening / Cimmerian
concrete / organic / earth
sparks / morsels / atomic
perpetuity / calls them

WOVEN

I do hope things have been going well with you since we last met. When we were at the park the other week I'm sorry if I spoiled our afternoon. It was coming across that gap in the hedge that set things on a negative course, if you recall. Both of us could see the row of detached houses on the other side of the hill. Of course you had no problem over that but as for me, I'm sure you'll recall how the sight of the uniformity drew out my toxic side. They were so evenly spaced, and all so neat and precious. I got a horrible urge to spit, in protest or something. That's just me. In particular it was the continuous, evenly spaced brickwork that got to me. Every house exactly the same. Most likely you'll remember vividly how I ranted and raved for a good few minutes. And of course, this cast a bit of a downer. I wouldn't claim otherwise.

At the time naturally I was too brim-full of irritation to think of things this way. What I did take on board though was you becoming very critical. You kept on repeating that I was comparing the houses to myself. And coming out the loser. Because of not liking to be reminded how the details of my own life were horribly messy and untidy? You said I was suffering from an inferiority complex. I thought this was a bit harsh of you and yes, I must say unfair. But I have to point out that, even though what you said was hurtful, it has helped me open my eyes. Because I've gone over and over everything and I've discovered I don't at all mind what you call my untidiness. It was simply the plain and unadorned line of houses that I didn't like. And I'll tell you why. They were there in one row as though they belonged together. But in reality were all so cut off and separate. So there was an element of deception.

And that is often how it is in our society. A lack of connectivity. The houses represent, oh I don't know, delusion or something. And no, I would NOT like to be that way myself.

Now I've had a chance to think it over I can see that we are on very different tracks in our way of looking at the world. And I must ask myself if you believed I was really talking about you when I said all that about the houses being so boringly uniform. Did you think I was saying you were disengaged and had no imagination? And, in fact, I do wonder. Was I?

Well, although your pattern is not like mine which spreads itself a bit more haphazardly, I'm almost certain that I wasn't slyly singling you out for criticism. But more than this – what I really want to say is, it doesn't have to matter, does it, if we see the world in very different ways? You could even argue that connecting with someone who has a contrasting approach to life provides a richer tapestry. But, of course, that's the way I *would* look at it, I can hear you thinking.

Anyway, what I also want to say is, thank you. Yes, and I'm not taking the piss. I mean that. Because what I now see most distinctly is if you'd never made those comments about my character I may not have delved into these deeper questions. And I do think it's crucial to analyse what's going on around you if you want to get anywhere near the truth. So, though I disagree with what you said I can't deny that hearing those words opened my eyes. The outcome is that I feel I can see us both a bit more clearly than I did before. And that is really something. So let's not be like the houses – pretending to be different but being all the same. Let's enjoy our differences and mingle. I'm thinking: the beauty of *woven*.

So what d'you say to meeting up again next week?

Threadbare...or

Threadbare ...or porous. Tears in what fabric? (Scene setting). Echo chamber & shower. Sterilised. Slow (to) comprehend (sion). Numb, clumsy, all thumbs, drumming... Sending poems to Arizona, Utah, etc ...memos to the desert, where the weather fits my clothes, Big Joe. Threadbare or ...porous. (This is what Pablo did). Shift / jump cut. Blisters like ellipsis / clicks in gristle, welling in the throat. Stiff. Thickets. From notes. Shackles. Nil by... Nil by... Un Africain du Nord, Pino, or a dweller in the south. (A) stranger in your town. Nothing by rote. Polyglot emphasis. Encrypted, up to a point. Aspire to the condition of ...what? Mystery & resistance, at angles. Double jointed child. Waifs & stays with me.

Sheet Lightning

It's true that I was up to my elbow in the vending machine when we collided. We were both in the hall of a shoddy motel where the wind was shaking the windows and threatening to tip the whole place into the lake below. **You** hadn't been looking where you were going and my head was so set on rummaging for something unseen that everything else was out of my field of vision. We **were** both the same slight and unimposing 120 pounds, so it was just a jostle.

You apologized but didn't continue on your way, just stood there, smiling.

I falsely accused the machine of stealing my quarters.

You called the machine a greedy little fucker and fed it until it spat out something for each of us.

I asked what brought you here.

You told me in great detail about how you were **trying** to convince your husband to become your ex. You had lived in this tiny mountain town for twelve years and now you were done with all of it, almost anyway.

When you asked about my arrival, I gave the brush off answer that I'd been expecting from you: I confessed that I was just stopping for the night, passing through, on my way **to** something bigger. You shrugged and unlocked your room. You left the door open, saying that you couldn't remember the last time you'd eaten dinner alone. I followed you in. The wooden

chair I sat in looked identical to the one in my room and together they probably comprised half a set that used to **belong** with a kitchen table.

I sat stiffly. I mentally doubled back to a few moments prior and wondered whether you'd intended for me to follow you. There must have been an expression on my face because you caught my eye, smiled **again** and shook your head. I think we both thought that we'd caught the same line and were being towed somewhere unseen. Maybe you wanted something from me. Is that why you'd kept the conversation going? **But** I had nothing to give, so whatever it was you wanted, I would disappoint.

The corkscrew willow of a man—the owner who had given me my room key—rapped on the doorframe. He addressed you by name and told you that your husband was on the landline. Again.

He refused to give the *screw you* to your husband that you requested. You sighed and gave me a look and followed him down the hall. I wondered whether it was stranger for me to stay here or to vanish back to **my** room. I heard the storm deepening outside. Through the sheer curtains, I got a glimpse of premature night and I knew I wouldn't be watching the sunset over the lake, which was the reason why I got off the highway and came all the way up here. How was it that a **deluge** could sneak up like that? Where I was from, it didn't rain this much in April and never did the weather change so quickly.

You'd left your tote bag on the bed and the thing had flopped over when you stood. I used the toe of my shoe to lift the edge of the bag so I could peek inside. What made you so trusting? I pulled my foot away and went back to eating my mixed nuts, but that glimpse lingered, developing like a Polaroid in my mind.

You came back angry.

‘It **kills** me to remember how beautiful he was once,’ you said, referring to your husband. ‘His words, his thoughts, his presence. But I can’t see that anymore and I don’t know how I once did. **So** strange isn’t it? How beauty is something you give to someone, but time either makes them ugly or makes you take back your definition.’

You told me that what you’d said about dinner hadn’t meant to imply the food from the vending machine, that there was a restaurant attached to the motel. Did I want to **join** you? You’d already ordered the only thing they were serving tonight.

You picked up your bag and brought it with us.

I learned that the owner was also the cook. **The** fish was some sort of white fish, caught from the lake this morning, glazed and baked. There were rosemary potatoes on the side. The fish had so many little bones in it, like nylon thread had been used to hold the creature together. I was unaccustomed to **living** near water and to eating fresh seafood, so I studied you for clues.

When you did not hunt around with your fork for the sharp threads or reach up to your mouth to extract anything, I didn’t either. I wondered whether the tissue inside my mouth was delicate—if I was weak. Sometimes the pricking sensations felt more like needles than tread.

You declared this fish was the best fish you’d ever eaten. **I** wondered whether you meant the species of fish or the specific fish on your plate, the one that never had an identity or a name and now was a **part** of you. I thought about how the fish I ate became a part of me too after I swallowed its flesh and bones and a little of my own blood.

While we ate, I learned a great deal about you. The interpretation you once gave to your husband, I began to give to you. I knew that our short time together would make your beauty last.

You excused yourself **into** the kitchen to inquire about dessert. You left your tote bag on the chair between us. This time I blindly reached in and wrapped my hand around what I'd seen earlier.

As I passed by your room on **the** way to retrieve my backpack, I kissed my fingertips and let them linger on what would be your door for the **night**.

I raced out into the storm and thanks to your umbrella my head was now shielded from the rain.

Sincere* - from Latin, *sine* - *without* and *cera* - *wax*, as fraudulent sculptors in Rome would cover flaws in their work with wax, in order to deceive.

*apocryphal word origin

APT

ChAPTER 1

WHEN I STEPPED OUT into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home. I was wishing I looked like Paul Newman--- he looks tough and I don't--- but I guess my own looks aren't so bad. I have light-brown, almost-red hair and greenish-gray eyes. I wish they were more gray, because I hate most guys that have green eyes, but I have to be content with what I have. My hair is longer than a lot of boys wear theirs, squared off in back and long at the front and sides, but I am a greaser and most of my neighborhood rarely bothers to get a haircut. Besides, I look better with long hair. I had a long walk home and no company, but I usually lone it anyway, for no reason except that I like to watch movies undisturbed so I can get into them and live them with the actors. When I see a movie with someone it's kind of uncomfortable, like having someone read your book over your shoulder. I'm different that way I mean, my second oldest brother, Soda, who is sixteen-going-on-seventeen, never cracks a book at all, and my oldest brother, Darrel, who we call Darry, works too long and hard to be interested in a story or drawing a picture, so I'm not like them. And nobody in our gang digs movies and books the way I do. For a while there, I thought I was the only person in the world that did. So I lone it

Found in S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, Chapter 1

My son as a jellyfish

I wake still half-asleep

my six year old son snuggled beside me

arms and legs wrapped round me as I lie trapped in the duvet

I dream he is a jellyfish

tense as his cold skin overlays mine but his tentacles somehow don't sting

I imagine us in the sea me a lumpy manatee entangled in his gentle gelatinous embrace

one	cool	tentacle-tip	rests on my	cheek
I	place	my flipper	on his	face
see	his	blue	eyes	blink
through	the	clear	dome	of his
body,	smiling	as	he	swims
up	and	up	and	up
I bubble	my	mouth	along	his
arm,	five	little	fish	kisses
pop	pop	pop	pop	pop
he	unsucks	his	sticky	grip
slips	down	the	thin	summer
duvet	to	stand	on solid	floor
becomes	a little	boy	once	more

Do these words need to serve a purpose?

Can't they simply be a herd of words
peacefully grazing on the page, lying
down when it rains, wandering from
capital to comma, or chancing upon
the occasional question mark?

Can't
they roam the paper until they grow
old, feeling the sun on their backs
the rain on their flanks, knowing
that there is nothing else they need
to do?

If they choose to group together
to form a sentence and chew things over
it's up to them;
even if it seems
as though they don't mean anything

Executive Malfunction

Organisation is not in my family's wiring.

We struggle with planning,
following a straight

line
of instructions
and the constant

d
r
a
g
of
housework.

We live in healthy clutter,
unbalancing

 piles
 of books,
 sketches
with little worlds built of acorns,
stones
 and dinosaurs

 littered
across the rugs.

I say no to dusting the skirting boards

and we focus on

laundry (check)

the kitchen (check)

 hoovering
 (check).

The children pitch in,

 haphazard
in their shifting

 attention,

before skipping off
 to their elaborate,
 focused games.

My own bed never made,
I cannot begrudge my daughter
sleeping in her play tent with her toys,
a tea party set up
for a rambling
hoard
of dust bunnies.

My own childhood playroom
was a morass
of Lincoln Logs,
with the occasional fossilised
dog poo.
My mother, working full time,
shut the door
and retreated
to her own paper nest
of genealogy records.

Routine is our mantra,
appointments (check)
homework (check),
a battery of alarms (beep, beep, beep)
reminders (check),

but our space
loosens its belt,
closes its eyes
to expectations
and allows us to

Trump's War on Wind: A Found Poem

- CNN Politics, December 23rd, 2019

I. Wind Turbines a.k.a. "Windmills"

I never understood wind.
You know, I know windmills
very much. They're noisy.

II. Bird Murders

They kill birds. You want
to see a bird graveyard?
Go under a windmill someday.
You'll see more birds than
you've ever seen in your life.

III. Windmill Flatulence

They're made in China [windmills]
and Germany mostly.
They're manufactured tremendous,
if you're into this, tremendous
fumes. Gases are spewing
into the atmosphere, you know.

IV. Let's Get Cosmic

We have a world, right?
So the world is tiny
compared to the universe.
So tremendous, tremendous
amount of fumes, and everything.

V. Whose Air Is It?

You talk about the carbon
footprint, fumes are spewing
in the air, right? Spewing.
Whether it's China, Germany,
it's going into the air. It's our air,
their air, everything, right?

Stanza break

VI. You Don't Say

You see all those [windmills].
They're all different shades
of color. They're like sort of white,
but one is like an orange-white.
It's my favorite color, orange.

VII. What Hell Looks Like

You know what they don't
tell you about windmills?
After 10 years they look like hell.
They start to get tired, old.

In the Rectory of St. Vitiate Catholic Church

Father. Both kinds. Priest and patriarch. I'm his shameful fruit. My mom is the "housekeeper".

Sorry, I mean she's the housekeeper. She cleans the kitchen, *then* they fuck.

On Sundays he gives communion to his flock. To the baptized members in a state of grace. No wafers for the unrepentant, who won't admit their sin. What I want to know is, does he get communion too? Does he confess to a mirror and stay on God's good side? Everyone in our village knows about me but no one talks about it.

Mom says she was "widowed by James who was a soldier and a hero". I did a school report on James, even brought in a random soldier's photo. I said James was so proud on the night I was born. He stopped strangers in the street to say, "I'm a Dad!" I said he saved orphans in Afghanistan before being killed. Mom said the school report hurt Father Richard's feelings. I opened my eyes wide, I asked why. She got flustered and vacuumed the hallway.

I like my photo of James. I look at it sometimes. Wish he were real. Confident and courageous. Good guy. Dad.

The End

black a into
exploding
a into unfolding
on feeding oh widow
stave to embers
pearl tea me
trifles fraises piss to
flakes triassic thaw to
down the off

Garden Globe

A response to the climax of Kenneth Grahame's Wind in the Willows:

'After this climax, the four animals continued to lead their lives, so rudely broken in upon by civil war, in great joy and contentment, undisturbed by further risings or invasions....

... sometimes, in the course of long summer evenings, the friends would take a stroll together in the Wild Wood, now successfully tamed so far as they were concerned; and it was pleasing to see how respectfully they were greeted by the inhabitants....'

*

Terrors of the wild wood rushing through bracken and thicket, hawthorne-scratched, rot ridden & nettle-stung, sprung from slippery holes beneath forest floor, roving stoats & wandering weasels weave silvery-quick, quick-as-the-wind, quick-as-the-unfettered-flight-of ravens-at-dawn. We wassail, we wasa, alive & thrumming, our wild minds spilling over. We weasels & stoats, writhe & slip between the cracks in the walls of the english garden, move beyond the gate stoats & weasels wandering anew the grasped garden bewildered

the garden enclosed.

A small font trickles downstream. Time paused and poised, held in the straight lines of a bronze sundial. Elongated shadows. Captured. Pruned hedgerows down elegant aisles. Perfectly sculpted leading lines, leading towards, a dazzling orb. A garden globe. Spherical glass reflects your image of the world.

What
does it mean
to make of
the garden a
globe?

Dear toad, what do you see? What meets your distinguished gaze? See the orb distorted, your body stretched, centring little old england, stretching your skewed image. Your body gleams, glints, encloses everything the light reflects.

What
does it mean
to make of
the globe a
garden?

And yet... look! Look closer! Cracks in the glass... tiny fractures... brittle and brutal and ready to smash... behind that body... hogweed rising... the wild wood returning... willowherb erupting... the wild wood seeding itself amongst the manicured lawns ... the wild wood rising ... creeping ... ripping open the walls the orb can no longer contain us

You wake. Sweat in the dead of night. Forget your name, forget who you were and then – ah – feel the cotton-soft sheets in your mahogany bed, your indigo robe drifts listlessly by silk curtains in the warm breeze. You remember you are toad as you are drifting, liling, languishing in the summer night, the moon outside as ever, drifting

stunning plumage of rose, daylily, dahlia, what once were rooted as root for food, now illustriously flowering for curiosity, a proper english garden, a proper garden for the man of the manor, botanical spoils, the rubber dries, the pepper stings & yet the weeds, the weeds are rooting, parson-in-the-pulpit flares from the hedgerows, arrow-sure leaves tinged black as toothed pewterwort spurts through imperial stone

outlaws emerge
outlawing the lawn the
parched gasp of the vanishing world
by moonlight we move, bewildering the roses
deadly nightshade plucked, pupils dilate, us belladonnas, us
weasels & stoats, wild with lust & delight & hemlock-stinking force,
spiralling out towards our climax towards our untaming moving inside
we find the masque, the pomp, the ball, twirling amongst the finery of the toad of toad hall
and yet! What's this? Your mask slips - nothing beneath but pale human flesh, the real toads
join us, newly untamed, newly undone, the weasels the stoats the rats the moles the
badgers the voles the otters the foxes the beavers the lynx & the bats & the boars are
smashing their balls, the thriving in the garden untamed, the garden reclaimed to our wild,
wild wood and there, at the end of the hedgerow, tilting on its side, a weasel holds your
garden globe, entranced, the vision of a single body stretched across the world before, with
a wide smirk and flick of the tail, the globe slips, and you see yourself shatter into a

t h o u s a n d t i n y s h a r d s