streetcake
issue 59

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Domestic Terror
(Erasure of Brock Turner’s statement to Judge Aaron Persky)

The night of January 17th
changed my life and the lives of everyone involved forever. I can
never go back to being the person I was before that day.
I am no longer a swimmer, a student, a resident of California, or the product of the work that I put in to
accomplish the goals that I set out in the first nineteen years of my life. Not only have I altered my life, but I’ve also changed [redacted] and her family’s life.
I am the sole proprietor of what happened on the
night that these people’s lives were changed forever. I would give anything to change what happened that night.

I can never forgive myself for imposing trauma and pain on [redacted]. It debilitates me to think that my actions have caused her emotional and physical stress that is completely unwarranted and unfair.
The thought of this is in my head every second of every day since this event has occurred. These ideas never leave my mind. During the day, I shake uncontrollably from the amount I torment myself by thinking about what has happened. I wish I had the ability to go back in time and never pick up a drink that night, let alone interact with [redacted]. I can barely hold a conversation with someone without having my mind drift into thinking these thoughts. They torture me. I go to sleep every night having been crippled by these thoughts to the point of exhaustion. I wake up having dreamt of these horrific events that I have caused.

I am completely consumed by my poor judgement and ill thought actions.
There isn’t a second that has gone by where I haven’t regretted the course of events I took on January 17th/18th. My shell and core of who I am as a person is forever broken from this. I am a changed person. At this point in my life, I never want to have a drop of alcohol again.
I never want to attend a social gathering that involves alcohol or any situation where people make decisions based on the substances they have consumed. I never want to experience being in a position where it will have a negative impact on my life or someone else’s ever again. I’ve lost two jobs solely based on the reporting of my case. I wish I never was good at swimming or had the opportunity to attend Stanford, so maybe the newspapers wouldn’t want to write stories about me.
All I can do from these events moving forward is by proving to everyone who I really am as a person. I know that if I were to be placed on probation, I would be able to be a benefit to society for the rest of my life.
I want to earn a college degree in any capacity that I am capable to do so. And in accomplishing this task, I can make the people around me and society better through the example I will set. I’ve been a goal oriented person since my start as a swimmer.
I want to take what I can from who I was before this situation happened and use it to the best of my abilities moving forward. I know I can show people who were like me the dangers of assuming what college life can be like without thinking about the consequences one would potentially have to make if one were to make the same decisions that I made.
I want to show that people’s lives can be destroyed by drinking and making poor decisions while doing so. One needs to recognize the influence that peer pressure and the
the core of being

to intentionally hurt

hurt someone

I

take it

all back.

I would never

never

shattered

I’ve lost
I’ve lost
I’ve lost

I’ve been

I’ve lost

I have to sacrifice

everyone

I will

I want one, male or female

I want

I want young people

just one
Into the Breach

I found out

I found out

how

my brothers & my sisters
died
along the way

& it scared me

treason—capital corpses
rot along the street
trapped
in hell
w/ a belly full of concrete,
rubber tires burning, tear
gas drifting
out

out

out

they never got out

the gov’t & army have
been praised
for their swift & effective response
galore and second chance

americans like canned tuna
stacked like pictures in a yearbook
or persons in a cell
or persons in a cell
or persons in a cell

a canadian is somebody
who knows how to make love in a canoe

a universe of in-between-ness
things we absolutely expect
to understand

like kisses on the sweet cheeks of proust
instagramming madeleines
dying water
(an erasure of T.S. Eliot’s “What the Thunder Said” from The Waste Land)

sweaty silence
of thunder
now dead

we were dying water
amongst dry feet

cicada water sings
when I murmur
over the flat mountains
fiddled faces beat
head downward
in decayed moonlight

empty bones bringing
rain
sunken obituaries

these fragments
fit you
All of the Patience of a Tomato

On the verge of rot, on the threshold of transforming into kitchen compost,
Ripe with wanting to burst, mature with needing to be publicly undone,
At a stage when pressure makes flying apart suddenly, violently, plausible.

No honey dish purchase, our dispiriting romantic talk, nor sweetmeat pap,
Just mendicants begging scrapings from road-wives elsewise disconnected
From tacit love, hope, as well as from gilt dreams of our prospect’s auguries.

Prognostications risen from nearby wastelands most often pile futures along
With manured pasts. They’re not satisfied by sops of sunlight, fruitful clouds
Proffering mineralized richness. Rather, they draw close to lifeless runnels.

Simply, no amount of dosh, piles of altai, or stacks of pelf ever can compete
Against edible, rubicund nightshades used to seasonally blowing up whenever
Water-soaked spots, pulp diseases, broken hearts, perhaps putrefaction, goa
‘THE Roundheads used to put their hats on that settle,’ my mother greeted me.

She was pointing to the oak chest beneath the stone-framed window of her living room. Dame Margaret’s chest, to be precise, which Mother had bought at auction years ago in Oxford. Dame Margaret Pewsey’s chest, dated 1607, iron hinges and lock intact, front carved with acorns and grinning elves, labour of love from the hands of some unknown craftsman.

I looked at Mother, unsure whether to correct her: she whose working life had been academic rigour, sifting through documents, precision in detail, demanding the same of her students. And why comment on a chest that had been in the same position for years? Ten at least, for Daddy had still been alive when she’d brought it from Oxford in a borrowed hatchback. ‘Another relic,’ he’d said, rolling his eyes, stooping to help Mother carry the chest through the cottage doorway, but there had been fondness in his voice; and in hers, laughter, joy in her eyes: ‘Imagine if the chest could talk to us! Just here, pet,’ she directed Daddy; and to me: ‘Now, Mercy, tell me what Dame Margaret would have kept in her chest.’

Mother had named us all after virtues: Mercy, Patience, Grace, as if stamping her daughters not of the twentieth century but of some indefinable past. For Mother, the past was not a foreign country but somewhere to be inhabited and assimilated into the present, peopled by real individuals informing, shaping, who we are and accompanying us through life.

When Mother brought the chest home, I’d been at Cambridge reading Early Modern History but was a bit hazy on furniture. However, with Mother confidence was all and, in tutorial, backed up with sources. ‘Linen,’ I stipulated. ‘Layered with
lavender and rosemary.’ Mother nodded. Instead of leaving it at that, I hazarded, ‘And the
beginning of her daughter’s trousseau.’ Patience was to be married to a Norwegian the
following year and wedding talk was creeping into our lives. Mother pursed her mouth. ‘But
would Dame Margaret have called it a trousseau? You need to check that word, Mercy.
French. Early seventeenth century. You could be right. Bit of research for you.’

Now we were both regarding the chest—that-was-not-a-settle. Mother turned to me
and her eyes held mine with a look that would not welcome correction. ‘Course, they put
their hats anywhere,’ she added. ‘Even on the altar in church, stripped it bare, moved it down
to the nave, used it as a table. Signed documents on it. No respect. So, what have you
brought me today, dear?’

Dear? Mother never called me dear. I had always struggled with my name, thought
myself the least merciful person I knew. Sometimes, not in the family, it got shortened to
Merce, which I hated even more. My friends and sisters compromised with Em. To Mother,
however, I was always Mercy, the name she had bestowed on me at birth.

Mother picked up the hemp bag from Pricerite and carried it across the stone-flagged
floor to the kitchen. There was what she had always called the settle; most houses had
apparently had one in the north Midlands where she’d grown up: stone, the length of half of
one wall like a wide shelf, north facing.

Mother lifted the bag onto the settle, peered inside. ‘Ooh! Ice cream! I love ice
cream. Let’s have some. I’ll get two dishes.’ She went over to the sink, opened the
cupboard beneath, where she kept cleaning materials.

* 

I’d only brought things from Pricerite for Mother because she’d slipped on the wet patio a
few weeks before and sprained her wrist. She no longer needed a sling, and the bruising had
gone, so the day we had ice cream she said she’d drive herself to Pricerite the following week.

‘Young people these days are very aggressive drivers,’ she told me when I called to see her. ‘Girls are worse than boys. One young thing up at the T junction, didn’t look more than sixteen, swerved round me on the left, tooting her horn. To think I’ve been driving through these lanes since before she was born! Next time you go to Pricerite, dear, I could do with some tea. Talking of which, how about a cup?’

I offered to make it. All three caddies, labelled, were full of loose tea: Indian, Earl Grey, Lapsang Souchong. I often wondered afterwards what demon made me open the cupboard. I didn’t need anything from it; neither of us took sugar. Stacked with no room for more must have been a dozen boxes of tea.

I suggested a drive out to the forest to enjoy the autumn colours. We were quiet in the car, a companionable silence, and I kept between thirty and forty. I glanced at Mother once or twice. She was looking away from me out of her window, hands in her lap never still, fingers twisting round each other like snakes in a pit. I stopped at a viewpoint. Straight ahead, the trees exclaimed their final triumph, the yellows, golds, reds of the year’s dying days before surrender to nakedness and sleep.

Mother always loved this time of year, maintained it was her favourite season, never tired of quoting Keats, made chutney, jam, planted bulbs. ‘Sleep before life,’ she would say. ‘There will always be spring.’

Now, sitting in the car, she said nothing, turned to me, tried a smile as if unsure of herself or what she should do or say. We were not a family for small talk about health. How are you? would be met with a raised eyebrow, a shrugged ‘all right’, as if to say: how should
I be? We never asked: what’s the matter? That would imply presumption on the part of the questioner that something was the matter. We were brought up not to presume but to deal in evidence, facts.

I wanted to say: tell me Mummy, tell me what it is. Wanted to call her Mummy, something I hadn’t done since I was a small child. Wanted to curl up to her, for us both to return to the womb, only now I would be the comforter, protector, sustainer. But I kept silent, put my hand over hers, stilled her fingers, felt a slight pressure in response.

Back home, I made tea. I hadn’t brought any more from Pricerite and Mother never mentioned it again. I started compiling my own list for her, checking in fridge and cupboards. I could see something in the microwave. I opened the door. Inside was a child’s cardigan, pink, and round the bottom above the welt a border of red reindeer. I picked it up. It was soaking wet.

‘What are you doing, dear?’

I turned to face Mother, wet cardigan in my hand, several questions jostling on my tongue but refusing to form speech.

‘I found it in a drawer,’ Mother explained. ‘Thought I’d send it to Silvia.’

Patience had indeed married her Norse god the year after Mother bought Dame Margaret’s chest but Silvia, her eldest daughter, was into nail varnish and re-releases of Abba.

‘I washed it,’ Mother continued. ‘I think there’s something wrong with the dryer.’ She poked at the cardigan, spotting my feet with water. ‘I’ve had several goes at drying it.’ She examined the microwave. ‘Ah! Defrost. That’s what I should have pressed. There’s a lot of snow in Norway, isn’t there? Do you remember, Daddy and I went ski-ing?’
I shook my head. Daddy had never been a skier, or any kind of sportsman. Walking boots and several miles through the forest had been his enjoyment outside a book-lined study. They’d only ever visited Patience in summer.

‘No,’ was all I could manage, little more than a whisper; a small word to encompass so much: no, Daddy never skied; no, you don’t dry clothes in the microwave; no, what’s happening to my brilliant mother?

I put the cardigan on the table, opened my hands, one wet, one dry, to my mother. She placed her hands in mine. I enfolded her in my arms, my cheek against her hair, felt her sag on a sigh.

Water from the cardigan drooled to the edge of the table and dripped onto the floor.

The End
it’s worrying
when
into the present
leaks
the future
scent

smelling the aroma
from when
you die

perhaps it’s the gentle perfume
of the spring flowers
you land on
when thrown out
of the colliding car

perhaps it’s the sharp edge
of the anaesthetic
when the surgeon
fails
to save you

perhaps it’s a lie
just the present
tormenting again
Address Is Approximate 2 (Nogales)

She’ll stand there all morning  
waiting for the wire  
her sunglasses reflecting travel agent ziggurats:

If it’s not here by 12, it’s over, and I’m gone.

A flash of yellow teeth announces the sunstroked blacksmith  
and his offerings:

sybaritic leers  
rib-eye stains  
powders  
entheogens.

(there’s trickery in the air - brujeria in the water).

Soon she’ll leave for the iron wall of Nogales, wound tourniquet tight, and  
forgotten  
like a junkie’s promise.

The border is now CLOSED  
Tequila Bar & Grill is OPEN  
Flourescents PULSE

......... snakeskin dream ...........

Morning brings a rare, cool breeze  
through grime-fringed curtains -  
young boys in jeeps buzz  
through rush hour  
through sun  
through dust.

Headache and hunger beat down her door until it all begins again  
with a phone call to a friend:

Michel is still in fucking Toronto

Bail is not forthcoming.
waiting by the lake

i

sky
bruised and scraped

clumps of green
through snow

ii

objects densify
round other objects

things grow thick
with wings

your breath expands
over distant hills

iii

a built world

planted by itself
or the mad happy
gardener

but made
ablossom

iv

senses spin and strand
over the world
colossal in connection

branch to branch
bird to bird

and light benedict on all
V

ice and steam
wait in the water

two swans
face each other
When I speak to my friends we often joke and reminisce about the past and one such time we got to speaking about the imaginary friends we used to have as kids and how we would often play or discuss things with them and even argue with them; perhaps it was just an instinctive way of preparing ourselves for growing up.

The general rule of thumb was they would come out on request, when you wanted to play or just not be alone. My imaginary friend was called Hugh, he was two years older than me and an exception to the rule, and I used to think he was a prick.

We were sitting at the dinner table one day, and as my Mum was reaching for the veggies, he slipped under the table and came back up holding his nose and gagging, he told me my Mum wasn’t wearing any knickers. He also said he caught my Dad playing with himself in the shower earlier and he wasn’t goddamn surprised. I intentionally dropped my fork to prove he was just telling tales, that vision still haunts me today.

Some things he told me were truths, others were just outright lies designed to ruin self-confidence and to push anxiety levels through the roof, Hugh found this taunting to be hilarious. For example, on my seventh birthday, he told me I was adopted, and the papers were in the third drawer down of my Mum’s dresser, all I found was a bunch of knickers and bras and what looked to be a torch that vibrated. Hugh told me that my Mum used to shove the torch so far up her fanny, you could see her tonsils. Obviously, I didn’t believe him, he lied about the adoption and the torch, and he was full of shit.
At this point he had also told me that my Mum was sleeping with the postman and that my Dad was a kiddy fiddler, so you can see what I was dealing with. When Hugh told me that my Dad had a little kid chained up in the house, I dismissed it immediately. Hugh said he could prove it, but I’d had enough, to be honest, I actually tried to unimagine him from my mind for a good couple of weeks before I realised the stubborn little prick wasn’t going anywhere.

The first day at school, already a hard enough time for a seven-year-old to get their heads around, was something I will never forget. The teacher placed me next to some kid called Robert, he seemed nice enough, but Hugh seemed almost jealous that I had even said hello to him.

In my ear all day, “you’re a homo, you’re a homo,” and slightly more inventive, “Jack and Bobby sitting in a tree, Jack blows Bobby, one-two-three.”

That carried on all day, “You’re a homo, you’re a homo,” until I lost the plot and screamed at the top of my lungs in front of the entire classroom, “I’m not a fucking homo!”, some kids laughed, some went white, the teacher did neither but did escort me from the class.

Mum picked me up early that day, she was very disappointed, not that I wasn’t a homosexual; my behaviour let her down considerably. Hugh was still unbelievably pleased with himself, and he asked me to follow him as he had something he wanted to show me.

“Where are we going?” I called out to him in pursuit as he sprinted ahead down the hallway and towards the back end of the house.

“You’ll see soon enough,” He replied as he finally made it to the cellar door.
My Dad always said the cellar was a work in progress and too dangerous for us to go in, I always wondered why it didn't apply to him though, Hugh used to tell me it’s where he kept the kids.

“Hugh, I am not allowed in there, even Mum isn’t!”

“Do you ever think to yourself why not?” he asked as he pointed to a jar on top of the cupboard. I grabbed the key from it and unlocked the door, the air conditioner was already on and I still recall the cool blast from the room as I opened the door, I remember a lot about that day. I flicked the light switch on, and nothing happened, “Oh yes, in the cupboard next to the door,” Hugh said, so I went back and grabbed the torch. I saw the vast array of jars and bottles of wine spread across various tables and felt my way along the walls.

“What are we doing here, Hugh?” I asked impatiently.

“Keep going, nearly there,” he replied.

I kept edging along the wall and finally came to the end of the room; I flashed the torch around and could see nothing else worth noting.

“Push that last panel, Jack,” he said.

I did, and it moved inwards, not just a little bit, and I soon realised it was a makeshift door.

“How do you know all this, Hugh?” I asked inquisitively.

‘Go inside, Jack.”

As I stepped inside and swept the torch around, I shrieked and dropped it, I scrambled on the floor in a mix of fear and panic and finally felt the handle and pointed it forwards again. The little boy covered his eyes up, and I moved the torch to the left out of his direct
of sight, he cowered in the corner, and I noticed the chain attached to the bolt in the floor and a plate and glass on the mattress next to him.

“This is Peter,” Hugh replied very casually.

“Why are you in our house, Peter?” I asked very naively.

Peter didn’t say anything, he just sat shaking.

“You need to ask your Dad,” Hugh replied.

As I turned around to shine the torch towards Hugh, I saw the etchings on the wooden interior of the room.

Hugh was here.

The end.