

# streetcake

## issue 59



@trinidecombe

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destroyed

your entire life

the core of being

I want to demolish

to intentionally hurt

hurt someone

I

take it

all back.

I would never

never  
shattered

I

I've been

I've lost

I've lost

I've lost

I have to sacrifice

everyone

I will

I want one, male or female

I want

I want young people  
just one

**jeff bagato**

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

**mike callaghan**

galore and ~~second~~ chance

a mericans like canned tuna  
stacked like pictures in a yearbook  
or persons in a cell  
II  
II  
II  
~~IIII~~  
block

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

**erik fuhrer**

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 publically 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 elsewhere disconnected  
From tacit love, hope, as well as from guilt 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

**Dame Margaret's Chest**

‘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

(ii)

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

john irvine

**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

collosal 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

Hugh's friend

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 unimage 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

line 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.