

streetcake

issue 64



@brett stout

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the trim

aced. the hold. out
the sequence. no delineation of motion.
i in three folds
become undone. delivered in range. the
time to underknow as
understatement. i have found your message
though late. no act.
image. clock hands and knots. the
replicating machine is still
moving. filled, the holes. am target
the skin for flaying
a closer view. with spars in
containers. the thread loose
in counting. i as founding in
liquid our placement. virtue
outside. wandering. the blots tightly turned.

Corporeal Economics
cancer economy
consumes
everything
to the point of death,
leaving
nothing
for the healthy
cells who
work + wish
to live in balance,
allowing growth only when resource
use declines

our next nominee should remember

ne-VAD-da
always moisturize
hand sanitizer is your friend
 and clorox, for when you get to the oval office
check what city you're in
never wrestle with pigs. you both get dirty and the pig likes it.
look out for numero uno
avoid kitchens
lose the friends from back home
fail often
the opposite of armor is curiosity
if you do the team of rivals thing, go all in
leave the gun, take the cannoli
if you do not ask, you will not receive
 squeaky wheel gets the grease
two women on the ticket is a good thing
whatever you do in life, do it well
no one else can create the art you can
if someone says "would you rather i lie," say yes
stop living other people's dreams
don't go to law school
play your opponent's cards instead of your own
you come into this world alone and leave it the same way
time heals all
trust but verify
some things stick
when someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time
the real applicants never fill out an application
kill your darlings
i really don't care, do u?

##

Have I Made It Up?

This.
Unspoken thing

cannot be articulated.

Rises like butterflies yes,

but also:

maggots and worms,
spiders and slugs.

Weights as much as an elephant
but is as small
as a ladybird.

It's a dance and you control:

the music,

the style,

the pace.

My only choice,

whether or not to

move my feet.

Just as I master the Waltz

it's Tango.

Rumba.

Bolero.

Swing.

Silence

the music again

The corners of my mouth rise in a grin.
My body vibrates with a noise that sounds like a laugh;
deceptively indicating amusement but

when I see you, I want to cry

at the intensity of the flies and the spiders.
And all the things that hide, but don't.

It's exposure which is causing the problem.

The dancers.

The lights.

The ballroom hall.

Don't go, one voice says.
Another, *Do*.

A fight ensues.

I've got the outfit now and the shoes, and I like dancing. Okay.

References to addiction are a cliché,
but, how often are you going
to turn down
a line at a party? Or say
to yourself, *I don't need that smoke?*

No, didn't think so.

Is this a regular thing?
Like the walk to work or the morning espresso?
Do you have a collection of photographs that one day, someone, will ask you to burn?

I've heard so many things. And
my opinion of you is

like nitro-glycerine.

It could be many. It could be few.

Still, I think I bother you.

Maybe it will abate

on its own,

or perhaps it's like Blake says
in *A Poison Tree*,

emotions

left

unspoken

don't go...

X's for Eyes

1

Years ago we loved life so much, everything in the world, including the air. The moral should be obvious. It's big enough to be seen among the cacophony of windows. I'm just wondering what comes next, if we'll only be able to view nature in assigned locations, old buildings originally designed as schools, warehouses, retail space. You'll go and sit in a dark room, surrounded by strangers. When you scream, only half of the people will understand.

2

I fell asleep to the rat-tat-tat of rain and dreamed I could breathe underwater. The grieving came later, when we learned there could be such a thing as too much sunshine. Animal rescuers cut open a whale's belly on the beach and found coins and plastic water bottles inside. Maybe it was a cry for help, but maybe not. People were saying it was only a matter of time before those little white birds returned to pick clean the teeth of crocodiles. Meanwhile, the rain would be represented by a succession of broken lines, and death by x's for eyes.

3

You arrive with 100 gallons of red paint, and all these people are thinking, "Oh my God," while you work out the next steps that need to be taken. It kind of gives you something to do with your sadness. You serve an idea that doesn't belong to you. There's no way you can just stop. You've got to keep accelerating. The invisible world is teetering between becoming and dying, and it can go in either direction at any moment. So the answer is "no" should anyone happen to ask if every ray of light comes back to us.

Overhearings from Many Streets

Found poem

I've lost my bone,
On the lower deck.
I'll buy a louse,
With twenty of them Blackberries.

Keep on fishing the well.
A day of clear water.
He told a lie.
What's in his cider?

cut up haiku 37



The flight from marriage—
an arduous procedure
rode the lonely train

the same thing over

like losing your voice
 from shouting down the traffic
 the ceaseless traffic streaming
like rain down your face *right*
 there on the screen it's like losing
 your way in the tangle of filthy streets

the same pale sun in your eyes the
 same directions same restrictions

go *here* for the real deal
 go *here* for the quick fixes
 and *here* for the basic facts
 the status just beyond your reach the adverts

splashed like rain down your face *right*
 there below the hairline
 cracks appearing under your feet

as SILVER SPOON FED you

 bite down swallow it down
 like the words up there on the screen
 telling you the way it could be when it's
nothing but the same thing over and *over*
 there go *here* go *there*
 and push that trolley

back into the stinking sewer
 adverts splashed across the screen
 in capitals in bold in desperate italics the

dogshit the cracks in the pavement the weeds poking through you try to
 rise above your status hover over the words now rising above the skyline

 like it's SILVER SPOON FED all you deserve

 without thought without engagement
 the ceaseless streaming traffic
belching dust in your dirty face
 screaming
 bleak obscenities the same thing over

 like you're more of the

lord. of. the. small. things.

i. am. lord. of. the. small. things. most. all. quicker. though. most. none.
wiser.
and. it's. true. that. time. is. like. these. blades. of. grass. seemingly.
endless. i. eat. my. fill. every. day. and. never. do. i. hunger. here. i.
have. a. river. that. doesn't. run. and. like. us. all. is. often. eaten. by. a.
sun. that. is. both. unaware. and. uncaring. in. what. it. eats. i. sometimes.
try. to. pretend. i. am. not. eternal. but. tell. that. to. all. the. ones. feeding.
the. earth. beneath. me. though. i. am. not. a. prophet. i. know. when. a.
war. is. lost. you. see. often. i. still. hear. the. sounds. of. living. things. and.
feel. the. goodness. of. a. cool. night. night. on. my. shoulders. though. these.
are. surely. dreams. the. spirits. of. the. earth. they. do. not. talk. to. traitors.
i. tried. to. tell. them. once. as. if. i. was. the. wisest: not. all.
tongues. live. on. not. only. are. some. animals. hard. to. remember. most.
are.
easier. to. forget.

ruby mccann

I'm still considering

beginnings..,

...so pleased to hear you

I like bright and dark sounds

that saxophone screams

something lonesome

I'm new here

re-new-ed been before

was born here re-turn-er

it's like locking a woman in a room

with an angry man

feels alright now

in this moment...

...he's on the right side of angry

lonely won't leave him alone

and this place stinks to high heavens

doesn't that tell you something?

don't know what's ahead

I've lost my sea legs

yes the ocean I'm here

at the Firth of Clyde

flowing into the Atlantic

to you my dear friend

on the other side

its daunting sometimes
the vast infinite width
and depth the divide

other times
it un-anchors me
takes me down deep within
a-minor tsunami at low tide

calms too calming yes
yes calm as the day
Icarus fell chasing dreams

was he fallen? did he fall?
smashed against a rock
I heard seas
unpredictable like that
a sudden change in weather
raging surfs slap like angry parents
my mother once
not my father shocked me
she cried afterwards empty-eyed
like a ghost in the kitchen

me too silently
alone in the bathroom
knowing I deserved it

I know these are small things
just coasting not just
still there are days I feel I can't be fussed
I know I need to re-adjust

re-learn to trust
get real or completely combust
then I turn like tides

today the flow can't wait
cause it's so good to hear from you
whitecaps rolling in
my lips curling a-drifting smile
softening splaying
foaming high-pitched
strains on that horn whispering

s'bin too long

I catch you on the high note
I'm switched on enriched
screaming staccato you got me bewitched
releasing water keys
it's been a long session
sliding cross rhythms
my trans-Atlantic connection

amy mcginn

pocket-sized trauma

enter the innominate boy,	strong and seventeen with a voice like	suicide; the girl in the backseat—
as something more permanent than simply	<i>the girl</i> — wearing a dress of hands,	tasting capitulation and white noise; the boy offers only
surrender or suspension—	she thinks it's meant to feel like this—	the gods looking on like parents clapping at a baby's first steps

At Least

i thought your tender side
would have kicked in
this morning,
as you made yourself breakfast,
two scrambled eggs,
and pancakes with a little bit of syrup
in the batter,
just like i described to you
and you would

remember me.

thought you would have
found a second
in your fast-paced life,
put one of your phones
to good use,
perhaps shoot me a text
saying nothing but *hi*.
thought you would have
probably
reconsidered
your running partner,
for someone who is
as swift as an arrow,

like me.

thought maybe you would have
walked pass your college degrees
hanging on your wall,
reflected on all the accomplishments you've made,
then thought about the cliché,
all work and no play...
thought you
would have looked at
yourself in the mirror,
unaccompanied, looked down
at the spaces between your fingers,
where another hand
could intersect with yours,
then thought about

love.

thought maybe someone might
have run across your future,
who resembles me, eyes, nose
stature all the way down to my feet
then you look at my photo in
your phone, and at least

contemplate.

thought you would have
felt my little prayer
swarmed over you,
then it covered your heart,
unbuckled all your
inhibitions
and you would stretch open your arms
and

yearn for me.

i thought you would have
thought about me
today
somehow,
somehow,

at the very least.

emily murman

Pushpinned (a spectrum poem)

Try to tell me one
more time that she
isn't real, roll your
eyes when the doctor
asks you what runs
up and down the rails
of our genetics

You say LOOK ME IN THE EYE! how
could you LEAVE

THE ROOM

SO SUDDENLY! forgetting the
thick distillation of her microcosm
stark saturation of infrared
film flicker forward flicker to
the screech of your
teeth multiplied
by ten hums
humming
in the
whorls of
her ears

You're less empathetic than
you think she is try to tell me someone corpse-cold
could listen to the
samesongsamesongsamesong
and grin each time

Each flick of the wrist wring of the hands
is like turning down the radio to parallel park the car
softening senses to
make sure you don't smack bumpers

When you pin her to the cork board
you forget she's still there I swear
to god she's more than
exoskeleton and the scale shine
shiny and bright
there will be a stiff jitter of legs
wings will twitch
and she will

fly away

and
bobbing flicking
bright light stabbing the squint of your pressed eyelids

The Understudy

A pair of sissors behinds her back
she wonders how much longer
before she is no longer the understudy.

¹She is flesh and blood.
not crystal or clay

filled with colour grace and beauty beauty and dignity

the sun
moon,

a world, a universe

exposed.

poisoned by

the Devil.

using clothes to cover her bruises
– she existed.

¹ All words found from *VICE* magazines.

Sylvia

My thoughts are like
granite ,
infecting the imagination
with black
salt
imperfections
and riddled
syllables
.
you died in my
garden and left
m e
eating
dry sticks.
echoes from
moon-blued stone
shake my
dwarfed cottage ,
Rigged with
antique lies
and

bone.

i

disfigured

you unwisely

with

glass

teeth

wh

e

n

I

need e d a
clinic.

I'm

Empty

without

your

beautifully smug

hair and

excitable

mind

.

Sheepskin

You were called Mummy. Not Missus, like the neighbours would call over the garden fence when they caught Dad marching to the beaten-down Vauxhall, hospital bag in trembling hand. “How’s the Missus bearing up? Send our love.”

It wasn’t Laura, like the haughty aunties and uncles would whisper in hushed tones while I sat at the top of the stairs, teddy bear straddled between my scabbed elbows, ears straining to hear but eyes scrunched shut.

Nor was your name cancer, though they let that define you. When we sat in the church, on hard wooden pews as stiff as Dad’s arm over my shoulders, the vicar announced the untimely passing of Laura Marie Anderson. But that wasn’t you. You were Mummy.

You were a handful of sparkly diamond rings that plaited my hair, an infectious high laugh. You weren’t the grey slab at the head of a mound of earth. I screamed when they lowered you into the ground. The words on the stone said mother, wife, Laura; but where was Mummy? I told them they’d got it wrong, you hadn’t gone. That this was someone else. I stamped my feet on the sodden grass, splashed flecks of mud onto my black tights and dress. Dad sunk to his haunches, his dodgy knee creaking, and took my pudgy fist in his and kissed my knuckles. His unshaven upper lip scratched my eczema.

He’d curled one of my short ringlets around his rough finger and whispered, “Hush now, Raven.” The pet name stung like my scabs. It was your nickname for me. You would whisper it into my black hair, send laughter into my big emerald eyes, while you joked you’d chosen the wrong bird when you called me Wrenn.

Maybe it all started with those names. Birds are easy pickings for wolves.

The first year without you wasn't the hardest. They say that it is – the nosey neighbours, the gossiping aunts and uncles - but it wasn't for me. Those 365 days were the kindest. I would wake up in the middle of the night, a scream tearing through my throat and my sheets wet. And when the bedroom door crashed open, there was a blissful moment I still expected it to be you. I could look out into the little garden, see your yellow watering can propped on the ledge and imagine you'd only just left and you'd be back in time for tea. I could still catch myself pouring soya milk into the chipped handmade mug before the reality hit me.

That first year I could still pretend you weren't gone.

Dad must have felt it too. The soya milk would reappear in the fridge every week, even though there was no one to drink it. But then, like grief has an expiration date, the carton found its way into the bin, its space in the fridge filled by something else: jam, fruit juice, beer. But nothing filled that gap quite right. Dad kept trying to fill that cavern, and neither of us said a word.

Your mug disappeared from the stand, your knitted throw vanished from the sofa. And talk of your dried on his scratchy lips. I didn't stop calling you Mummy; I stopped calling you anything. At seven years old, the word crusted away.

I lost Dad too; he rode away on a racing horse; he disappeared down the bottom of a bottle. There was no one at my bedroom door when insomnia pumped out a scream now. I would walk the winding roads to the churchyard to cry at your stone, for both the parents I'd lost. I wanted you to grow back out of the soil; I wanted to be sunshine watering can.

You missed my first day of secondary school. The other children bounced around me, hopping out of their parents' cars and throwing distracted waves and goodbyes behind them. Dad missed that milestone too. He was still sprawled on the sofa when I quietly clicked the door shut and walked the muddy path by the main road. By the time I reached the rusted

gates, my black pumps were caked with dirt and my tights were flecked with muck. I wanted the ground to swallow me up, like it had done to you.

There was a vacant space when I needed help with my homework, an empty slip in my logbook and an unfilled chair at parent's evenings. I couldn't tell you the boys I fancied, but who would never spare my flat chest and skinny legs a second glance. I couldn't confide in you about the girls I envied, their blemish-free faces and trendy bags.

And there was no one to tell about my new art teacher in year nine.

She taught us in the design studio, a small room adorned with huge church-like windows and high tables with creaky stools. It smelled like a pack of face paint that had been left open in the sun in that class.

On the first day of term, she sauntered into the classroom and everyone lulled into silence. Her dolly heels clicked along the tiled floor like delicate hooves. She was dressed all in white. Crisp, white blouse and snowy bootcut trousers like she belonged to a seventies pop band. Even her silver hair was flecked with white and cascaded past her shoulders like a wild mane.

She beamed at everyone as she passed, at the boys I fancied, at the girls I cowered from. When she caught my eye, her head cocked ever so slightly to the side. Her nose twitched, like she'd caught whiff of a stench. But when she passed by my desk, I swear I saw the corner of her smile falter into a snarl.

From that first day, everyone loved Ms Vincent. She never raised her voice, set the least amount of homework and let us have our headphones in while we worked. My classmates would hang off her every word, staring at her doe-eyed as she flicked through powerpoint slides. They all wrote her Christmas cards.

Her smile never faltered again. She treated me the same as everyone else. She would watch me work over my shoulder like the other kids. But she would stand a little closer. Enough for me to feel her breast pressed against my shoulder. She passed me clay work out

of the kiln like she would my classmates. But her soft fingers would find their way to brush against mine. I caught her eye once. They burned at me, like embers. Wide. Brown. Animal.

I kept my head down as best I could, not just in Ms Vincent's class, but in every lesson. I'd learnt to do that since year seven, when a dead bird found its way into my locker. But keeping a low profile doesn't work when the vipers are living on the ground, and their sharp teeth reared to bite me.

The popular girls had a new name for you, Mummy. It was a humid, mid-afternoon hour slicked with clay, and the ringleader, Harriet whispered loudly to her friend when I passed by.

She didn't call you Missus, Laura, or wife.

Dead.

She called you dead.

"I heard that weirdo's Mum is dead."

The word crept into my ears, burrowed into my brain, made my jaw clench and my hands bunch into fists. I walked on and was behind Harriet in a second, my fingers entwined in her honey-scented hair. By the third heartbeat, I had torn her from her stool and my hands were raining down on her in frenzied slaps. I pounded my fists against her back like I was beating a rug free of dirt and grime.

Then Ms Vincent was there. I don't remember her approaching. One moment it was just me, surrounded by a classroom of agape mouths. The next, her hands were at my wrists, tugging me away from Harriet. I let myself succumb to her strength. I looked down at her fingers, felt the weight of the human contact. Her long nails bit into my skin. They were painted red, like the claws of an animal who had just devoured its meal. She ordered me, with a clipped bark, to stand outside.

I left the room, my head hung low again. When I looked down at my hand, little crescent indents shone there. They stared up at me, leering like the hideous moon that would later obscure my bedroom window.

I had detention for a week. Not in the art classroom with the big, open windows and the chirpy janitor pottering around in the spring flowerbeds outside. And not in the musky gym hall with all the other misbehaved students. But in Ms Vincent's office, where the blinds were always drawn, and a sickly yellow light crawled out of a lamp in the corner.

The heat was unbearable. It was barely summer but in that cramped office, hemmed in by shelves of books and with a grey fur blanket draped over the guest chair, it felt like a furnace. Ms Vincent would sit opposite me as I copied pages from a Renaissance art textbook. The desk was so narrow, I could feel her legs brush against mine as she crossed and uncrossed them. A tide of heat swept out as the teacher moved her legs. Sweat pooled at the base of my spine.

Midway through the last detention, she set her pen down and looked up at me. She told me that I looked pale with heat, that perhaps I should unbutton my shirt a little.

The school year finished not long after that. I counted down until that day with red crosses on my calendar. On the last week of term, the school sent out letters about an exhibition hosted by the art department. I screwed up the memo and threw it in the bin.

But when I came downstairs that evening, I found Dad clean-shaven, dressed in fresh clothes, lingering by the front door. He was wearing a belt for the first time in years. "I wasn't snooping," he said, his eyes everywhere but on mine. "I thought it was about time I was your Dad again."

When we walked out of the school gates after the show, Dad put his arm across my shoulders. He didn't feel stiff or taught this time. He told me he was proud and my heart swelled. I looked up at his face and saw the traces of a wistful smile.

“What was the name of that teacher again? She seemed nice,” he said after a pause.

The summer holidays came by and lighter nights drew in. Dad would take me to the beach at weekends, we would water the garden and tend to the vegetable patch with the sunshine watering can during the evenings. We would lay on our backs on the patio, sugary sprinkles crusted at our lips from ice creams, and the sky would be clear. One night, we jolted as the neighbours set off fireworks into the summer night air. We watched as they exploded into a thousand colours and I wondered if it was you, Mummy, your diamond encrusted fingers reaching out to hold us and tell us everything was okay now.

One humid evening, Dad didn't come home. I sat at the kitchen table, scooping ice-cream from the tub that was meant for two, staring at the front door. The sun set low in the sky out of the window. Worry gnawed at my chest.

It was only when both hands of the kitchen clock hit twelve that a thud came at the door. I jolted from the table, flew to the door and whipped it open. There was Dad, doubled over, drunken laughter foaming from his mouth. And under his arm, propping him up, was Ms Vincent. She stood there in a snug grey dress and a black fur coat that fell to her knees. Silver strands glistened in her hair and her mouth was framed by crimson lipstick. Her talons were still coated red, and were dug into Dad's chest.

My muscles like lead, I stumbled aside and allowed them right into our home. The household you built, Mummy. The safe haven that used to be decorated with your quilts and tapestries but was now muddy and blackened by the feet of Dad and this woman. Ms Vincent stepped straight in like she belonged, Dad clutched at her breast. Her wide eyes rested on my face, a twisted smile on her thin lips. “My special girl,” she whispered. And then she hoisted Dad toward the stairs, the jangle of his undone belt thumping against his thigh.

I watched them go, the front door still ajar, the yellow glow of the moon pouring in.

Your soya milk is a sweet but distant memory on my tongue now, Mummy. Summer faded to autumn and with it, came the arrival of a six-pint, family-sized milk in the fridge.

The change in season saw that black fur coat claim a permanent place on the coat stand and allowed those dolly shoes to settle next to mine on the rack. Dad's wardrobe became home to white blouses and bootcut trousers.

The nights grew colder, but I slept in pools of sweat. My screams during the early hours turned to whimpers. Dark, looming shadows flitted before my open eyes now, not behind my dreaming eyelids.

It happened one night. Then two. Then I stopped tallying the nights and learnt to count the seconds instead; mouthing silent numbers until it was finally over.

As the moon leered through the slit in my curtains, my bedroom door would click open. Dad's distant, ignorant snores seeped in from across the landing. Hushed footsteps made their way to my bed. Clammy, clawed fingers slipped beneath my covers.

Come back and turn my night light on, Mummy.

