

V. May Tomic

## Questions about the Cake on the Floor

The cake is on the floor. It's more of a gruesome smear than a cake, at this point, spread out in a tableau of white icing and strawberry gore, but I can promise you that this formless thing which is no longer a cake was a cake three seconds ago, and had been a cake for nearly ten minutes before that. I derive this figure of ten minutes from the fact that I would mark the advent of the cake's existence to the precise moment that I placed the final strawberry on its top. This was the conclusion to several tense seconds of trying to hold my unsteady hand still and centered over the cake, and it did make a very satisfying, completion-suggesting sound when I finally dropped the overlarge berry with a quick exhale.

If you were to ask the cake though, which you can't since it's on the floor and not even a cake anymore, then maybe it would try to tell you that it first became itself in the oven, convulsing upwards against the frantic heat closer to thirty minutes ago. If I were to ask the grains of flour that went into the cake about when they thought the cake started existing, then maybe they would argue that it existed in them all along, even before they got mixed in and baked together with all the other ingredients of the cake. I think of the innocent grains of flour, waiting in their cool dark canister, quaking like broken earth in the sifter and burning away finally in the oven's frantic heat. It seems suddenly cruel of me to think that the cake only started existing ten minutes ago, since this would make the grains of flour martyrs that died for a cake that didn't even exist yet.

If I were to ask you when you thought the cake became a cake, you would probably be more interested in knowing why the cake is on the floor, and I would tell you to ask my sister that question. I'm not sure what she would say about when the cake started existing, if you asked her that instead, but since it was her cake during the

eventful ten minutes it spent as a cake, maybe she would know. My sister, whose voice I can still hear through my phone, which is incidentally also on the floor, seems to have a lot to say on the topic of the cake, so I'm sure that you two could have a very productive conversation about it. Maybe she could even answer your question about why the cake is on the floor. I can tell you how the cake ended up on the floor, since I was the one who threw my phone at it twenty seconds ago, but this would hardly answer the question of why it's there.

It's true that there is no question of "who" here, since I've just now told you that I was the one that threw my phone into the cake. Yes, I traced its catastrophic arc with my outstretched hand, felt a shivering satisfaction at the sound it made against the tile (and hoped that my sister heard that sound, too, through the phone) — but this in no way makes it my fault that the cake is on the floor. The question of "why" belongs to my sister, because this thing that is no longer a cake had always been her cake, for her birthday, and it was her call three weeks ago that made me bake it. It was her call today that made me violently unmake it, but three weeks ago she called me up and made me agree to make it.

So, maybe we should say that the cake first started existing with that call three weeks ago. This lets the cake have a much longer life, and gives the grains of flour something more substantial to have died for, which I find comforting. I think my sister would probably agree that the cake started existing when she asked for it, since her ideas are always immediate, pressing realities to her, and this seems a good enough answer to end with, for me, since there is no changing the fact that the cake is on the floor and there is no party for it to be brought to, anyway.