

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e E i g h t e e n

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Everyone

by **Katie Jean Shinkle**

Brother tells us that if we holler at the spirits to come to the windows that they will at the exact moment we are taking a picture, and if we holler “Hey You, I Want To See You. Look At Me” they will. A kid with a mohawk tells us that he went to some old slave house down South where his grandparents grew up and he did that, yelled at the wide gaping holes of where windows once were, where someone had snuck underneath barbed wire, past part-time police officers and the threat of trespassing tickets, and threw rocks at the windows with the intention of breaking them. What a waste of energy and time, just to be destructive, the kid with the mohawk says. He went to take pictures of these windowless windows and yelled something like “hey, if you want your picture taken come to the window” and he said when he had the film developed there were faces staring at him in every single window and he lost the picture as soon as he got it, it just disappeared without a trace.

We told a story about when a picture of us got stolen from our bedroom and how the boy that stole it got syphilis and died. The kid with the mohawk leered, as if we should invite him over to our bedroom, as if why in the world would we ever have boys in our bedroom? We didn’t ever have a boy in our bedroom. And we just learned about syphilis a few days ago.

We will mistake syphilis for tuberculosis and tell all of our new friends, street kids from the neighborhood, that we are bleeding from our penis.

We tell people we have tuberculosis of the penis. We tell everyone we have a penis.

Husband to Husband

by **Lam Pham**

I want to be a straight man and sleep with as many beautiful women as possible. Tall women who dance on oil drums. Short women with arms like tree branches weighed down by fruit. Shy women whose voices thicken in bed. All women. I want the bedroom cold and our friction to light the bedsheets afire and my towels to smell thankless when they leave. I want our partings bittersweet. I would write their names on all of my dollar bills where George Washington’s clavicle should be, fold them into swans and hang them from the ceiling. Once I marry, I do not want sons. I want to hold my child in my arms, the hem of my collarbone her flotation device and tell her everything she already knows but will never hear again. I would name my daughters after mountains or oceans because women are either forces of rock and stone, or mirrors that glide ice cross its ripples. And they would emerge in all shapes and sizes and bear my name, but not yours.

Raw Amethyst, Rose Quartz, Bismuth

by **Kelly Schirmann**

In the aisles we were wrestling with twist-ties to wrangle the same bulk goods. I think we should be friends, he said, and his soft fur strong-armed my heart into waiting outside in the cold until many pennies slept in

his pockets again. Up in the air he pulled dark chocolate from his coat and broke little triangles for my mouth. The world owed him this much, milk and bean melting on the tongues of strangers. After that I had things hiding in my purse long before my feet felt the dry rubber of snow outside. I'd warm them in my hands 'til they grew accustomed, reaching fingers—first for a doorknob through cobwebs of our whispers. He left while I was still asleep. I paid for the stamps that carried his long letters through the rain, week after week. When winter wore its spindly bones out and pale flowers threatened the dead earth with their white roots he creaked my steady porchboards with his feet. There was smooth skin now where his dark hair used to tuft, his rounded shoulders suggesting headstands, the gathering of palmed hands at heart. We spent steps in the tepid sunshine amongst the downtown brick, under the canopies of bare spring branches, where I unburied for him things longer-buried in my pockets. He kept silent as I unpacked them and then his exhales evaporated from somewhere inside him. I don't take things that don't belong to me anymore, he breathed, turning away then to let my hair blow around my mouth as it made itself into shapes I couldn't control.

Really it's like being let down soft by the gentlest gravity with only the blood in your ears and the bong rips in your blood. The sky will be high and hard white or an easter egg blue that will fall into your open mouth like a leaf. Low viz days you will struggle with your peripheries and breathe only to carry the calcium to your bones should you wreck yourself against a snowbank or catch your edge in the trees and flatten your lungs. But mostly you palm your wax and point it straight downhill, think of airplanes descending and what to do with your arms. Like the first time you took off your shirt in zero-degree weather for a boy with chapped lips who caught snowflakes in his beard.

It just doesn't even make sense to stay here, he said, arms floating up like in water against the gray bare of wintertime trees. The boom of thunderclouds hiding beyond the dead forest forced themselves through the branches and thumped against our smooth chests. All our late summer deckboard visions tornadoed by swirls of snow. All sound, our laughter, collapsing against the dry slip of dead leaves which were twisted ankles. They were saying, I was thinking, there were no thunderclouds at all. Those faraway rumblings meant only that fat men swathed in oranges were skulking into the forest with their hats and their fathers-in-law in search of animals they could skin and eat with shotguns. There were beech trunks in every church parking lot whispering something that we could follow if we put our faces to the smell of the damp ground, gently, so as not to hurt my feelings. From every crewneck sweatshirt bloomed a diesel bouquet hinting at escape. Salamanders burying their small bodies in the near-frozen earth. I sat down right there in the condiment aisle of the local grocery store with my hands over my ears, trying to make sense of it.

Lifestory
by TT Jax

#1

I waited for affirmation but breathed and bruised instead. Nights Mama beat the particle board roof with a broomstick—winter brought the rats of the woods to seek warmer quarters, a rain of claws and teeth on the roof. Then Mama died; didn't know what to do with her and it was a while before they found us. The rats got in, that winter.

In the mountains we drink creek water: clear and quick the life blood runs in rivulets, breaking in rainbow whirls over rocks smoothed by relentless friction. All of our doings are encased in a veil of sound, glass high and tinkling shatters shatters swirls. In cool dim crevices salamanders sleep, breathing deep through their own cold skin. Crayfish prowl the cracks for the young. Black bears drink, deer and bobcat drink, raccoons and rats: like family we gather creek-side to drink and prey upon each other. Water runs over bone, a froth of green.

Wind winds through turning leaves, awakening the rattle of limb on limb like bones clacking, brittle tissues throwing orange, blood red, yellow slick like underbellies: a warning before the fall, leaves murmuring mountainside over water breaking on rocks. Everything in motion here, turning.

My heart pounds sometimes in sunlight, still afternoons, still. The mountain crumbles in increments beneath my feet, over centuries prior and lasting it packs folds over the bones of salamanders, bears, Mama. I will fall before the mountain; the rats will get in, root for warmth in the hallow of my cheek.

#2

She of course knew the potential for failure: shouts down the mountain, staccato footfalls heavy through plywood walls. A bee buzzed in slow drone circles, drawn to her sweat. Chilly outside, the sun behind the clouds: still she sweated; she sweated, still.

Such an intimate drawstring-heart feeling precluding the affirmative moment of fail. She waited with bated breath as shouts small still like pebbles skittered to rock slides, erosion. A drop of rain or sweat between her eyes: shadows deepen, as if a bird folded wings to collect sun and clouds to itself, ease its own anxious heart.

She fell backwards into grass and rocks: secret cobwebs, interstitial ecosystems of roots, mouths, eyes pressed beneath the darkness of her fall, her sweating skin. Tip-over girl: in too-tall grass and granite she laid back.

A door opened: now it was coming, of course. Like a trumpet aflame the shouts sharp burst up out from the shack, disturbing bees and beetles small with guts full of the dead. Scurry: now it comes.

She opened her eyes: uncertain sun in sky suddenly scraped of clouds, picked clean and blue and vacant if not piercing. Above a small red hawk circled slow spiral searching, alone. Pray for salamanders next, she thought. Cool star-feet like kisses on her palm: pray for salamanders next.

#3

No one: the same no one that is always here. A bee buzzes round her head as she wrings a dripping sock. Fingertips wrinkled with water, borax in the cracks; she folds the sock over a plastic yard chair, hands stinging with cold, wet.

Flies eat shit, eat the dead deflating caterpillar that she'd watched chew a blade of grass the morning before. Butterflies stir tumult, beating up secret eddies of wind, flutter-tornado shifts in the universe. Water falls, slowly toothless chewing the mountain to sand. A queen bee fucks underground, overhead a solid veil of sound, tissues, currents in a dark weighted with packed earth, stone.

No one: the bees and fucks and shifts and dead that radiate like roots, dendrites, reaching snapping through dirt planet space. The ground sinks: soft mud post-rain; a bee drinks from the sock. A frog tan and spotted lands heavy on fat feet, mouth a broad grin snap-lipping everything in one throatless swallow.

Forecast
by Peter Kispert

Cookbooks and boxes and shelves. She sits lakeside. There are creeks running sling-slow, a porch that hinges on the chest of a boulder. He swallows syrup and knives. There is wishing. Both feel bound, toward the bottom layer of cold detritus, leaves assembled in smiles beneath the waves. Snakes abound. The clouds become smudges, then erase themselves. They watch. In the pond of detonated goldfish—six clouds of orange scales, suspended as if billions of miniature faces.

The 'She-Loves-Me' Knot
by Troubadour Kaul

1.9 I said "I write so much empty in space because you are everything in nothing."
You said "Nothing?" I said "Everything." You said "Nothing?" I said "Everything."
You said "Nothing?" I said nothing. You said everything.

2.1 You said "Promises are wordy waywardness,
the sky coughing black clouds sans rain."

I said, "Most times, the clouds can assure earth of rain
but often fail to persuade the rain to earth. "

2.2 You said "My prayers are a whisper that's why no one can hear them."

I said "My hearing is your whispers when praying that I do."

2.3 You said "Silence is golden." I said "Try again, that one is too clichéd."

2.3.1 You said nothing. I said "Silence is so beautiful that..."
then looked at you, bit my tongue and joined you for the next three nothings.

2.3.2

2.3.3

2.3.4

3.1 You said "Love is a victim of predilection"
as you ransacked an old lover from frigid memories for a midnight snack of tears.

I said "Tears are the prey of coercion" and I held on to your hinges
with my teeth, screwed them into your sniveling naked door frame with my fingers.

2.3.0 You said "I'm not very good at this."

2.3.2

2.3.3

2.3.4

4.1 You said "Your fingers are debonair diction."
and tickled my fingertips with your body.

2.0 I handed you a blank book of poetry called *Promises*.

how they strike a balance between calligraphy and death metal
by David Greenspan

how they play videogames

Francis crawls inside a toilet to marvel at the copper piping. He bottles the liquid to sell as holy water to politicians. It's hard for Francis and Sarah to fuck in their laundry room with junkies nodding off in corners. Sarah gathers lint from the machine to spell out poems. Your spaceship makes the most beautiful music, she writes. Francis writes, your tuba is malnourished, dig into the rich soil of junkies' arms and plant an apple

tree. They write three books of lint verse then light them on fire because of artistic differences. This fire scares off the junkies and Francis and Sarah fuck to a sitcom laugh track.

how they feel at home

What is there to do but throw cinderblocks off the roof, Sarah asks. She tears down a poster of the sky to expose fields of wheat and corroded sewing needles. Francis grabs her hand like the plane is crashing. The plane is crashing. Francis and Sarah put on each other's oxygen masks and remain so calm. Mice swarm out of Sarah's collar and run towards a stewardess. Francis drinks malt liquor from his shoe and offers Sarah a gulp. They slow dance through the aisle to a crescendo of other passengers' prayers. If we crash on a desert island, you can wear your new bikini, Francis tells Sarah. She laughs too loud and says, I will make you a Speedo from the pilot's forehead wrinkles and the sun will wink at us as we sleep in coconut trees.

how they deface the mona lisa

We're on top of the Empire State Building, take off your coat, Sarah says. If we go uptown now we'll hit rush hour traffic, Francis says. They can't decide which is true so they fuck like rock, paper, scissors. Harder, my toes hate themselves, Sarah screams. They are a wildfire, burning down Central Park oak trees. Francis robs a grocery store with a screwdriver. He pawns their computer for rosary beads. Sarah starts to clean the playground but ends up masturbating in a tube slide. Her pupils are bowls of milk. Cats dip their tongues into her eyes and lap up every drop. Francis and Sarah play hopscotch as night opens its trench coat to try and sell them a fake Rolex.

Coaxial Studies
by Isaiah Swanson

Greyhound Triptych

1.

Dwelling a while on the brown-bright back of the girl's head in front of him Grandpa thumbs himself thickly secretly under denim.

2.

On the back of each seat two tongues gliding across ice on the small screen make concentric circles.

3.

When the movie is over a large Chinese man stands and glances over at the woman in the seat next to him and notices that one of his hands is holding a knife and that his other hand is grasping the woman's small neck and now the knife enters the woman's side he actually *sees* this up close watches it unfold in a close-up shot the knife takes a slice at the mouth when it screams there's iron in the air a heartbeat somewhere runs circles in my ear

Postscript

The bus was an experiment in scheduling, in coming to capacity, in arrival.

Fit cleanly into its garage with two inches on top and three feet on each side.

The driver's rotation included New York, Boston, Baltimore, D.C., Roanoke, Knoxville, Newark.

An albino pigeon flounders on the cobblestone, misplaced, snatches up a white roach, hopscotching in a watery pool of oil, enters sideways the dying crop.

In Chinatown three sisters emerge from a first-floor apartment wearing white cloth and hemp glance up at their wilted edifice and mourn their brother who is not dead whose soul migrates up and down the East Coast bounces terribly through the cities against caution the deep night trailing

the social worker (9)

by Sarah Certa

makes eye contact with you from across the room & it's all green lightning dark lash flashing like sun rays & sea waves & when she smiles it's red lips over white teeth so brilliant it makes you lick your own teeth & feel beautiful & breathe easy like the breath of a woman with messy hair who wears nothing but an oversized white blouse & cotton panties drinking coffee in an armchair by a window through which the sun warms her bare legs & then there's sand & wine & an ocean in her eyes across the room a moon rises

Mind

by Joseph Spece

Mind, your matter is a great nest.
You would not close shutters,
would not wire the coves of your
twig sheaves to a pole
miles off; and should rain dampen
the bedding at your bottom
it is the throat that tastes—
the throat in the mind; the weather
cannot daunt, nor loss, nor can trap
still the teem of that
greeny composition. Your borders
recede and breathe deeply; your livery
is flown, happening; beyond
the bunch of larkspur that seems
the best of your pastiche
there is another,
and the promise of another.

In the Corn Field

by Lydia Unsworth

It happens that there is a child running through a heaving swaying mass of corn. The corn stands higher than the child itself, is more complete and more richly developed. The child's face is pink against yellow, beige against green. The midday sun makes everything incriminatingly visible.

A giant voice is behind the child. Child is skipping away from our conceived gaze. Voice is behind us, behind our disembodied 2-D character. Voice is loud, booming, deep.

Voice, although deep, is muffled and slow. It is decreasing in tempo with each syllable, dragging. Voice warns child not to enter the competition. The child will remain innocent, will not be in the race.

Child is running and skipping, is in a different world to voice. Corn protects child with its warming enormity and child goes on, ripping off an ear, twirling it in hands or before face, discarding it, claiming another.

Voice is slow and loud and threatening. The child will not disobey! Voice envelops child in its frequency, slowing until it resonates, until bones of child are shaking with deep, low sound-waves. Child fears and is lifted out of playful wander. Child is halted and knows the fear of the world.

Child is snatched out of time's continuum for one brief and everlasting moment. The frequency is more than words, the slowing. There is meaning in the deceleration, awful truths the child cannot yet understand.

Child knows fear and child knows rebellion. Child buys a ticket because this is the only way to be strong. Child knows the chances of winning are minimal, has basic concepts of probability. In buying a ticket the child learns risk, danger, protest, freedom.

Booming voice is still beckoning in background. With ticket in hand, child runs, flees. Corn field could not be emptier, less useless, or more fragile. Child flees. It flees but there is no chance that child will win. Child would not be singled out among many, for child is nothing, no-one. Voice and ticket and irreversible actions haunt the child. It considers consequence and shivers in the steady one-way traffic of time.

The thing is done. Child learns worry. Irrational worry in the face of statistics. And the child learns guilt, is paralyzed by fear. Voice repeats, is looping round and round in mind of child, until new sound forms and expands out of the distance.

New sound is melodic, uplifting and final, lifting cheer straight out of the brown earth. New voice is death's own messenger, oblivious. Child cannot share in the joys of the world. Child looks down at number on ticket. New sound is reading out its improbable numbers, destroying the world.

Child has put an end to everything with one rash gesture. It cannot be taken back, voice will be listening. Voice is unseen yet always within earshot. Child cannot hide. When it does not stand tall and go to collect prize, new sound reads out child's full name. Ears of corn and ears of father are one and the same.

Child runs as voice beckons to it, a deafening wail which deepens and spreads to infinity.