

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e N i n e

[words by Kate Wyr, Peter Schwartz, Christina Farella, Meg Pokrass, Bradley Sands,
Mel Bosworth, Angela DeAngelis, Zachary Tyler Vickers, Cortney McLellan, Richard Osgood,
David Peak, Roxane Gay, Gregory Sherl, Steven J. McDermott, & Kimberly E. Ruth]

Apart with Other People by Kate Wyr

The dog was growling to be let in. The woman never wanted to be inside. She didn't like seeing the pictures on the walls and all of the Salvation Army art work. The woman stayed outside smoking.

"Look at the neighbors," she said and pointed with her foot. They were fighting, but in a way that was sure to lead to sex. The young girl had her hand on her hip. She was cursing. The boy slumped against the car, taking it.

"It's funny, isn't it?" The woman blew out smoke. The man saw what she was trying to say. They fucked in the doorway and the woman left.

The man paced a little, then turned on the stereo and forgot.

The dog was growling to be let in. It had a hot spot behind its right ear and got mean if anyone looked at it. The man let it in.

The woman got lost and entered traffic in the wrong direction. A lady cop pulled her over. The woman asked to find the nearest interstate. The cop provided the route by pointing southwest. The woman went.

The man paced a little, then turned on the stereo and forgot.

They lived apart, with other people.

"It's the hypo," the woman said.

The man looked at her.

"Morbid depression? It's what Lincoln called it. I thought you knew that."

The man said something about Sartre. She bluffed her way through the conversation.

"Or maybe, hypo mania?" the woman asked.

They looked at each other and fucked. The woman left, needing to stop at a gas station to wash.

The man met someone else. They fucked. They were insatiable, he said.

The woman.

The women the women the women have the same want.

The man called the woman because he wanted to see her new lip color. It was intriguing to see her look like an ex.

They both came in their pants and the woman left.

The woman went home and drywalled herself into the hall. She listened for the other person to come home. She woke with TMJ and migraines in her teeth.

The man.

The who?

He mauled her like she was eight and alone with her parent's friend's kid. She stayed still, and then shifted her weight.

The woman said, "I once woke up with the word SLUT on my arm. I got a nosebleed. It would make a good film. I could wear a tortoise shell hair clip."
She went home and fucked her other.

He called his new someone a lot. He told everyone how he hated it that she ignored his calls. His friends often asked about her.

Once, the woman was next to the man when this question was asked. She seethed and then became very social. She talked to old men because she never knew one. She could smile and not have to back down.

She made him a picture of Saint Anthony. The significance was lost, however.

He said, "I feel like you aren't trying to stop." And then he sent her an email and a text.
An email and a text. An email and a text.
The dog growled to be let in.

Anonymous Confession #1 by Peter Schwartz

old man, revolver, capsule, what-
ever you're calling yourself these days

I've suffered the ache of the vague
semesters of your half-love

recorded the arc of your atrophy
in my very best penmanship

given you bread and liquor
and my idea of romance

*

I've X'd myself off the calendar
every time you've asked

and studied your moody absences
like a psychiatrist with only

a chair for a patient; I've boxed
he worst of you next to my old toys

no matter how hard
you've played

*

and in desperation, I've written
you sleepless valentines meant

to be both bigger and smaller
than they were; I've shot flares

into dangerous skies hoping
you'd remember my next

postcard before my next
birthday and so I've aged

alone.

Untitled. Diptych by Christina Farella

I

the matador pianist teases and
presses the keys (recumbent harp; supine guitar;

bull slain with xylophone ribs) squeezed
his chords resilient; arpeggiated; nimble.

they jackrabbit through boudoirs
down the hall. Kimono thrown on a chair

indicates a body bared {somewhere} curved as a }cello{
the radio thumps, as though a ghost resides

within the wires, withered and small, but
poltergeist heart beat-beating a Bach chorale

into the golden lit room—the lamps with blue lilies
betray their antiquity and sigh; senile.

II

the walls they do, agedly cave
slightly at the middle, inversely obese

unable to control their girths—they consume boarders:
lovers; thieves; merchants; lawmakers; nannies; deadbeats

painters; all carrying with them suitcases of memoir;
tribal childhood dances, fingers pricked simultaneously

and blood rubbed together—sworn (swooning) kinship.
the matador musician bears a resemblance to someone,

one of beautiful bones, immaculacy from finger-pad
to brainstem. A child (bull) watches as he wavers from room

to room (cape teasing). In the heat, wallpaper
peels from walls. His music stops and soup is served.

Weasel by Meg Pokrass

Kurt's family moved in over at the Crawford's house. The Crawfords are dead and buried in the bone orchard, but the house is still there. Mom says it's rented.

Kissing is Kurt's gift. When his tongue is on hers she decides what his real name is: WEASEL.

She says it to herself, roles it around in the back of her throat.

They are kissing and feeling each other up under a tree down the block from where she lives. His mouth has a different flavor - today its Coke. She's getting hungry from his taste. Her stomach growls, she hopes he can't tell.

What ever happened to your dog? she asks between wet lips.

Left, Weasel says. She remembers a mangy mutt dog, wasn't the type you wanted to pet. People said the parent's had it put down, that it bit someone.

I really want a puppy, she says.

Not one that pees all over the place, Kurt says, touching her nipple. Those are the wrong type. She feels the sun on her back, water trickles down her arms. Who knows? She may also be the wrong type.

Old woman out walking her poodle under an umbrella gives them the eye, looks at them sideways. Too long. Sees something and can't look away.

Wait, she tells him.

Woof, woof, he says.

She's sick of worrying about what people think! Pissinh fucker, she says very loudly. Her hands thwap her mouth, and she stares at him.

He laughs. Such words from a pretty bitch. Touches her underneath.

The Architects of the Dismantling by Bradley Sands

The Earth is scheduled for dismantling at 8 AM. The architects spend a lot of time preparing for 8 AM. Their blueprints are comprehensive. Their blueprints are beautiful. The architects make a lot of sacrifices to produce blueprints that are comprehensive and beautiful. They sacrifice meals, sleep, organized work spaces, family time, grooming habits, and clock-watching activities. Without clock-watching activities, they

deny themselves the pleasure of counting the ticks until the end of the world. The architects are looking forward to the dismantling. They will finally have enough time to do all the things that need to get done.

Mediation by Mel Bosworth

I sat across from my enemy on a picnic blanket, his face hard like coal. He told me to go fuck myself. I told him the world was getting smaller.

On a green field bordered by mountains and oceans, we shifted and stared while the world around us lessened. First the clouds collapsed on the hills, and ancient granite became pregnant with fluff. The birds, confused, dove into the mix becoming rocks with hawk eyes and beaks. Bedecked in cobalt, the new species chirped, an amalgam of pitch both shrill and low that caused the sheep to bleat.

“The world condenses,” I told my enemy.

“Go fuck yourself,” he replied.

Then the mountains merged with the oceans, swirling peaks with frothy tides. The sharks spun with the dolphins, and the tuna laced with the whale. It was a delectable aquatic quilt the hermaphrodite sailors harpooned.

I gestured with a carrot to the redwoods that shadowed my enemy. With a doubtful scale, he weighed my truth, then twisted to follow the point. The redwoods bowed and bucked, ripping their roots from the earth. Spreading their branches for the looming embrace, they yielded to what would come.

“The world grows smaller,” I told my enemy.

“Go fuck yourself,” he replied.

The world rolled closer, tightening its knots, and we knew our time was short. Tilting my head, I asked my enemy, “Why is it we are not friends?”

But my words were drowned in a wave of sound as the world devoured the field. In a stampede of heat, the blanket bled at our feet, and two candles puddled as one. Sucking our lips and breathing ours lungs, we told our self to go love our self, then the world became a diamond.

Dumb-dumb Bird by Andrea DeAngelis

Dumb-dumb bird sat down disrupt and abrupt. Dumb-dumb bird didn't understand I need space and there wasn't any space here for her squawking and turquoise bubble coat. Dumb-dumb bird got mad when I had to school her with several elbow jabs. She should know but soon found out the elbow is the sharpest natural weapon. Dumb-dumb bird didn't like that. She chirped. She cuckooed to the other chickadee next to her.

Chickadee wasn't buying. Chickadee sang, “Next time say excuse me.” Chickadee was with me. Dumb-dumb bird was still crowing, “Excuse me? Excuse me? She's the one pushing me and there's half a seat between.”

Dumb-dumb bird doesn't get it. Doesn't have to. I have a knife here to let her get it. But the blade is as dull as her undersized brain.

“Dumb-dumb bird shaking her dumb-dumb head,” I said. “Go on, keep shaking that dumb-dumb chicken neck ripe for cutting.”

Dumb-dumb bird's feathers puffed out and wilted. She peeped, "Forget it." Dumb-dumb flew off at the next stop.

Because of Me by Zachary Tyler Vickers

because of me wanting to get your attention daddy, because of me needing you to be proud of me is why I tried to fix what happened because of me, because of me fussing while you honked your sad trombone songs classically fingered, because of me mimicking your griefed face, because of me and my face that reminded you of mommy, because of me sliding down her chute toward the tiny opening of light that delivered me to brightness and a masked white man who snipped the bungee between us disrupting our same heartbeats, because of me and my selfish stealing of her heartbeats, because of me and my selfish need for your pride daddy I didn't have because of me, because of me and these milky threads dragging behind me like extension cords, because of me I can't go night-night in that Big Cradle In The Sky because of because of me, because of me because of me because of me, because of me noticing the tiny opening of darkness in the wall just beyond the upright piano, because of me believing the tiny opening of darkness in the wall was mommy, because of me and the selfish rattle in my chest keeping rhythm for only me because of me, because of me and the idea I could save mommy if I went back in through the tiny opening of darkness up the chute to return her heartbeats, because of me and the idea I could make her heart rattle with mine again, because of me only wanting you to love me like you loved mommy, because of me thinking it was possible for you to still be my daddy and me to be your son, because of me wanting to become important to you daddy is why I tried to fix what happened because of me, because of me wanting to mimic you happy and in love instead of griefed because of because of me, because of me trying to impress you so when you saw how all was safe and right in the world again you'd know it was because of me and not because of me, because of me trying to fix it by crawling to the tiny opening of darkness in the wall I trusted was the beginning of mommy confidently pressing my finger there

Obese With Armor by Cortney McLellan

Paraffin-coated, we slipped right past each other. Dipped and dunked, wax-encased, couldn't even scratch our itches. Finger just slid over shin, slick like butter.

Some nights you'd hold warmed hands against my candle-stomach, pant hot breaths above my nipples and neck. Surfaces liquefied, we'd drip oil on the sheets, splatter as we rolled, pushed, pulled. Worried we'd melt together, meld together, wake up a solidified one, afterward we'd curl up to the edges of our bed. The morning sun shone on hardened chunks, irremovable white lumps. I'd buy new sheets. We'd start again.

Some days you'd lift me by my toe, dangle me out like a rotting fish.. You'd find the nearest lake of wax and immerse me, bestowing new film. Stratum morning after. When righted and released, I'd shove you in and totter away.

At the park, in the first snow of winter, we had some trouble moving. We were a pair of lurchers, obese with armor, heaving our bodies down the path. There were some lovers under a tree, moonlight illuminating flakes in their soft hair. The girl held the boy's hand close and their foggy breath mingled before diffusing into dark. You bent down, creaking, and broke a stick off a bush. When you chipped at my thigh, I nibbled at your shoulder.

Now my skin is gauzy, weak. I catch you sharpening your nails. Your veins are visible and often the urge to poke them overtakes me. You catch me thickening, my joints jamming with old wax. We break for the bathroom, turn on all three faucets. Steaming water rushes out. We slip in, splash, flip, float. And sleep entwined.

A Beautiful Day for Coop Renner to Play by Richard Osgood

Open the door and release him unleash him the burbanite wild on their knees to beseech him and scatter and clatter and tumble and jumble and fingers through dirt-dragging dragging hand-flagging his non-Sunday best as the mound-brown patch scratch-ratchet dog he calls Benny wag-wagging his tail from his bumpside to rumpside and ball-tossing Coop plays the game of forever and points to the sky with an open-mouthed cry at the lifting the lifting the soaring balloon waving bye-bye to birdies and treetops and parties a tiny blue capsule of innocent wonder arm-casting to capture a piece of the head-vast and bubble-fish striated sky.

Thin Tissue by David Peak

she grits her teeth
when we fight

her words are
steel-logic castles

at night
spiders stagger
from her mouth
twirl from
silk strands
of drool

wrap themselves
up in cocoons
of reddening
blood organs

she sleeps tense

muscles
taut steel cables

Other Sisters by Roxane Gay

You are the sister who sees but says nothing, who hears who knows but does nothing. You hold your breath, chest tight, the muscles closing in on themselves, pulling your ribcage to your spine, fingers clenched hoping that you will forever always stay the other sister.

You look away when she stares in your direction, avoid the hard conversations, lie awake sometimes, watching her watching you as you both wait.

You try too hard, give too much, hope too little. You think you're not strong enough.

You are ready, waiting when he comes home from work. You run to the kitchen, bring him two cold beers, then two more, and two more still silently stockpiling goodwill so you will stay the other sister.

You squeeze your eyes until your ears ring until your head quakes then threatens to split and spill open, who covers her ears, who clicks her heels three times. There's no place like home.

You crawl into bed next to him. Your skin crawls against the thin paper thin sheets. He is neither gentle nor kind. He is familiar.

You try to love him, make him happy, look past his body sweating over yours and up through the ceiling, the leaking roof. You dare to look at the sky. You ask him if he loves you best. You ask him to leave the other girl alone, you do that, you try. You say look at me. You say I don't fight, not anymore—I come to you, I can make you happy. You beg, let me be enough. You know you are not enough.

You could leave but stay, stay because you try too hard, give too much, hope too little. You think you're not strong enough. She will leave but it won't be soon. She will leave. She will take you with her.

You love the very early morning when the sky is still blue gray and the world holds still and everything is fragile. He lies asleep next to you, his drunk soaked arm draped across your chest, the stubble of his beard tickling your neck. Only then can you slip away, back to your bedroom where she is always waiting, wide eyed, sitting in the corner of her bed, knees pulled to her chest. You crawl into the empty space next to her, curl up, exhale slowly softly slowly. She will run her fingers through your hair and massage your heart and without words thank you for that night, nights long past, many nights yet to come.

You're the sister who goes down. Down into the basement, cold damp dark. You pace in tight, frantic circles until you're sweaty and strained. You stand perfectly still. You scream and feel the sinews of your throat unraveling. No one not anyone hears a sound but the other sister.

Concerning Your Holes by Gregory Sherl

Listen: I stepped on my glasses and threw them out.
Or maybe I buried them under a swing set
somewhere in New York City. Logistics,

they don't matter when you have a headache.
But, if baby bifocals coated in cleaning solution
sprout from sandboxes and the toes of children,
I'll know I buried them. Then I'll call you.

Let's say he's had you longer.
I'll tell him: Yeah, well, I've been in more holes.

I drink milk so my bones grow like weeds
weaving in and out of wooden fences.
My muscles are cemented balloons.
I tap on your bedroom window and it breaks.
Briefly, I stop watching the door. I turn on the stereo.
Supposedly people get murdered all the time: in public restrooms,
while eating mozzarella sticks,
just breathing.

If I turn the volume louder, people still die.
If I turn it lower, the hum puts me to sleep.

Spatula Hands by Steven J. McDermott

Now? Here? In this way? Frost glazed dock - shoe slip. Tottering leg pegs, windmilling arms. Splay-splash. Upside down dunked. Lung convulsing limb-flail. Surfacing, sputtering, breath-pump pistoning. Panic-stroked pull-strokes. Legs maybe moving, no feel, immobile first. Ice caked pile hoop - clench-goal. Calf-skin gloves soaked, slippery. Finger skin freezing. Fingers, feeble touchers, useless numb digits. Grip strength, grasp-less. Chest bump cockled piling. Clasping spatula hands. Squeezing, clutching, squeezing, until squeeze not squeezing. No feel no float. Brine-swallow salt-breath. In this way. Here. Now.

In Five Sentences by Kimberly E. Ruth

1.

we breathe controlled air. outside, the large mass of weightless, uncontrolled, matter takes recognizable form. i point to the inching worm in the distance. we spear through him with shiny blades and heavy wings. i am in the air now.

2.

funny how the sun didn't inform the flowers of its departure. they are stuck now, on this shade, like dried foundation on a towel. it's like a censored bedtime story illuminating shapes on the wall. a rooster looks down from a rooftop. close your eyes, you tell her.

3.

i am witnessing the wind and it is moving empty shopping carts. i am reminded of you. you held me tight, once, here, in front of the eggs and condensed milk and i miss that. it is still cold here. a black cloud rolls over and it, too, reminds me of you.

4.

there is too much air up here. the cross roads below don't. i take out a ball of string, black in all its order, perfect in its shape. i try to tie myself to a cloud but it does not take. quick, grab a camera before the wind comes, he says.

5.

he blew up my balloon and i held my breath. as it got bigger, so did my eyes, as though air were being blown into me instead of the balloon. i was filled with air. it was filling with air. i am in the car now and the window is down and the air is blowing and my hair is blowing and the balloon is dancing and mom says hold it still she can't see behind her, so, i held it still.