

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e S e v e n

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Zachary C. Bush, Barry Graham Lydia Copeland, Conor Robin Madigan, Liz Hall, & Peter Schwartz]

Listen Up by Peter Berghoef

that is not the river I was talking about
that is not the spot where babies sleep below the surface
the river said "I am a very different river"
but I tell you it was wrong
it could have been lying flat out
there are no horizons in play
the feet were swallowed by another type of silt
the flood plane wouldn't do this to us
this is a bungled mystery
burn all the imposters

Cleveland, Ohio—2002 by Sean Ruane

Lemon verbena is spilled on a broken hippy, shit man my shirt man, echoing through the great Hall of Hippies, the one erected in the spring, a year ago Tuesday, to celebrate our new leader, not himself a hippie, but rather a believer in hippie wisdom; that, if properly detoxed and maintained, it will be hippies that solve the myriad traffic problem that plague Cleveland. The display hippy bebops away towards the men's room wherein he is judged by a hippy bathroom attendant: what's with the lemon, man? Industrio-corporate protesters, man, dousing me with their lemon, their fear, regurgatants, the prelude to a white-collared chamberpot malaise, their very own...turn down the lights, jack! A desuetude of hippies, term of venery coined by propaganda TV devices, falls out of a closet in the great hall like old soccer balls and hockey sticks, forgotten. A beat hipster, mislabeled, rolls across the floor in linear disregard, taking the erratic trajectory of a bumpy apple. Ahh, who's going to clean up all these damn hippies, you with your history machine, me with my whisk broom!/? There is a sound of the grinding of hippies; the history machine is stuffed back into the closet, turgid with hippy and lint. Lock it this time. When our new leader makes his rounds he mustn't see the mess, our majestic pith-helmeted leader, sycophants trailing in muted lockstep, as he wanders like a stray phallus down the warm corridors of Hippie Hall. A fine operation, he thinks. The new leader is saying 'Thank you'. Are any of them yet speaking to any of our issues? No, your newleadership; however, one does moan about econometric models in the night. Well, how curious! --And to his predictors and hippie divinations...what have you? Educational demographics and transportation network characteristics...on choice of transportation mode; bus, walk, bebop, auto, astral projection, carpool, single occupant vehicle, jetpack, monorail, duorail, pack mule, or bicycle. The new leader smells progress. Capital!! Buy that hippie a drink! Wait, sir, please stop jumping. We believe he has misspecified his functional form; he muttered on about logit models when a probit model would have been more appropriate considering the categorical nature of the question; a transient manifestation of our acute detox paradigm, we suspect, not an overt attempt to dupe our traffic ministers. Do you like Cleveland, Brian? Yes, it is mother's milk, el presidente. Then why do you taunt me with the smooth tits of false hope?

Other People's Jackets by Jennifer Pieroni

Crouched; both of us just knees, arms too long, and faces. We hid. Quietly, at first, as the party raged outside. First you skidded along the hallway floor in socks, saying you drank coffee then cognac. I had no flexibility in the guest room doorway, watching as you opened the closet door. You found chewing gum and tissues in pockets. You found five dollars. You said, "Come on," and I was yours again. Inside smelled like our grandmother and also leather and also dust. Inside I could hear the unhappy breath in your ribs, your asthma. I would have reached out to touch you, but I was shy still and

unaware of my own potential. We were knee to knee, identical. You flipped the switch and I fell back into a dark fur coat. I fell back and nobody came for us; nobody ever came to bring us to the party.

Snails by Sara Reihani

If snails had skin that was warm and veins that were white then maybe they could crawl into my ears and nestle there absorbing sound, and I wouldn't hear anything and could go bare-eyed and not see anything and then maybe I wouldn't be afraid of anything because it would all just be soft and misty like the fog on the highway when tires kick up the sheen of drizzle and someone screams so much melody that nothing else needs to be said. When my fingernails don't look like my own because they're yellow-knuckled around another palm and I'm so glad and so ashamed that something has happened then I wonder if the magnetic force field around me has reversed - like Forces repel, the universe and I are like forces and it wiggles around me, never touching. Forceps are what I need, to reach underneath floating ribs and pluck something growing on the spleen, to wrench and scrape off the mold.

Word With a Face by P. H. Madore

I am eternal.

I told them about how I don't like the door. The door, it slams loud every time the fucker comes home. I can't even describe my rage when this happens. It's outstanding, it's an outrage. He slams the door. Every time I see him, he gives me this judgmental look: I am doing better in life than you. I am a better person. I am trying harder.

Even though all these things are true, I get angry. I get drunk nightly and swear to the opposite. All I want him to know is that I drink because of him alone. Sex is an obstacle because he exists, because he makes things harder than they have to be. He thinks he's my hardcore friend. He's not. All he is, is a prick who makes things harder than they have to be.

The time is 1:07AM on an October sundry night and she calls to say she is on her way. A few hours ago she could have been anyone, but tonight her name is Holly, and it is up to her how long her name remains that.

Things happen around here. Continue to happen. I have trouble keeping track. It's like I make typographical errors in life as a whole. I'd love to break down but I don't have the balls. I don't have the guts. You are a bit better at life than I am today.

In other places, people are experimenting with film and words.

Bi-polar disorder is a word with a face. There are broken-down palaces everywhere, and all that can be done is a remix of culture as perceived.

The War by C. L. Bledsoe

When I couldn't put up with the noise anymore, I went and found someone in green.

"Can you just move it a bit further away?" I asked him.

He pointed me to another man in green and this one pointed me to a woman. She sent me back to the second guy but I couldn't find him so I decided to cross the lines and ask someone there. But they were even less helpful because they didn't understand me. Really. Who doesn't speak English nowadays?

I went back to the first guy but he was on the phone. I went back inside and turned up the volume on the TV.

Outside, people in green were dying. The house shook every fifteen minutes or so and I had to keep a top on my drink to keep out the dust. I didn't mind that, so much. It made me feel like I was stopping at a gas station going on a long trip. Someone banged on my door and screamed for me to let him in. The noise was terrible outside, the screams horrific. There were several of them, now, banging, screaming. I changed the channel, settled in, let them knock.

Another Day at the Park by Nathaniel Tower

Every time I go to the park, I notice all the things I don't have.

I don't have a dog. I don't have a kid. I don't have a kite. I don't have a fishing pole. I don't have a picnic.

While I am noticing the things I don't have, I start to notice the other things I don't have.

I don't have a lake. I don't have a duck. I don't have a playground. I don't have a pavilion. I don't have a squirrel.

Then I start to realize that no one really has those things, and that makes me want them more than the things that everyone seems to have, like the dogs and the kids and the kites.

And then I run down to swoop up the lake.

And I drown.

The Dead Cells of the Day by Molly Gaudry

James Tanaka, aching to fix somehow the pain of his wife's leaving, is ass-up to his elbows in all things blue. He began by painting the doors.

Back door, Tranquil.

Pet door, Freedom, though there hasn't been a pet in years.

Storm doors, Cloud Nine.

Patio doors, Peace.

Screen doors, Serenity.

The front and most important door, Possibility; and its knocker, Rhapsody in Blues.

He can't help the names, but he can choose them, and so he does, with care.

Last month: Christ Hospital, 3 a.m., a Nature special about the mating habits of blue satin bowerbirds. What James learned: Older males build bowers, four-feet high, from branches and twigs. Once built, bowers are temporarily abandoned as males search for and gather plastic bottle tops, clothes pins, flowers, snail shells, parrot feathers, pen caps, fabrics, yarn, buttons, and other objects so long as they are blue, for anything bright and blue will do. They return, decorate, display. Some have even been known to chew up blueberries, make a paste, find a small twig and gnaw the ends into a soggy fray, use it as a brush to paint the blueberries on the bower's inner walls.

Tiny bowerbirds chirping in a high up nest; this is what James saw when the surgeon placed a gnarled hand on his shoulder, said, I'm sorry, the operation was not a success. As if James's business of loving his wife was a deal gone south. James lost patience, Can I see her? Of course.

\$9,000 later, the living room walls are a perfect mix of Shooting Star (50%), Nightscape (35%), and Moonshade (15%).

First-floor crown molding, Wishing Well.

Second-floor pilasters, Shimmering Mist.

Ceiling medallions, Sensual Whisper.

Bedroom walls, one hundred percent Loyal Blue.

Lovebirds for the bedroom carpet.

Peacock for the bedside lamps, complete with Blue Jay shades.

His heirloom headboard, Hypnotic Hydrangea.

Bedding, a hopeful garden of 800-thread count Dutch Iris Rapture.

Duvet, Corporeal Cornflower.

All seven decorative pillows, Blue Spruce Seclusion.

Nights: James dreams he is sitting on the edge of Miriam's hospital bed, her back to his front, her white sheet covering her chest. James, she says. Miriam. What are you doing here? Come home. Home. Yes, home, with me, I want to show you something. Show me something. Something I've done. What have you done now?

Even the appliances he replaced, he wants to tell her.
Coffee maker, Cobalt Caress.
Toaster oven, Topaz Twinkle.
Washer, Fountain of Youth.
Dryer, Deep Space.
Refrigerator, Cordon Bleu.
Blender, Biscay Bliss.

Instead, James says, You'll see if you come home. I can't, Miriam says. Why not, tell me, please, tell me.

Silence.

Even their toothbrushes, James thinks, his firm and navy blue, hers soft and pale, nearly clear—Oral B, both. He scrapes Cerulean Siesta from beneath his nails. Miriam doesn't investigate. His hands fall to his lap, one per thigh.

Go away, James.

The finality of this wells springs pours from his eyes as he wakes up, alone, as far away from Miriam as away could ever be.

Months later, a new dream: James asleep, the whomping of a car door closing muted through the bedroom window, Miriam's key in the lock, Miriam's footsteps through the house, Miriam undressing and slipping into bed, beside James, but as far from him as possible, which, because she is so close, is even farther than before. When he reaches out to touch her, she sighs a huffy sigh. It is the most terrible sound he has ever heard.

What, he wonders now, is more worrying—his dreaming of her return or his shouting, upon waking, loud enough for the neighbor to call the cops, To hell with early nineteenth-century pink-and-green-tiled mosaic arabesques, and bashing them to hell with a sledgehammer, throwing the busted pieces through the second-floor window to the frozen lawn below, for he'll have only Artesian Springs tiles (4.5 x 4.5 inches, with Isle of Capri-colored grout) for his Miriam to bask in when she is ready, once again, to wash, to rinse, to slough off the dead cells of the day.

& the wake was such by Ryan W. Bradley

& the wake was such
that I coaxed her into the closet
and groped her
amid distressed leather jackets
and navy pea coats.

& the wake was such
that no one was surprised
when a naked woman on a bicycle
crashed into the front door,
someone just handed her a beer
and offered to pierce her labia
for free in the viewing room
next to the coffin like performance art.

& the wake was such
that each band had to kill themselves
after their set and join the mass grave.

& the wake was such
that our tattooed limbs made piles

by the door and our flesh
was empty for the first time in so long.

& the wake was such
that we put the argument behind us,
agreed punk was dead and we all crawled
onto the pile of bodies to lay
with our surrogate mother & father.

& the wake was such
that no one was left
to cover us with dirt.

Monkey by Ravi Mangla

We can't sleep, nah-uh ... not with all this noise. We toss and turn while the monkey bangs his cymbals outside, in the back garden. Brass on brass, beating, clashing, the din, rings out from between his emaciated arms. My daughter brings him bowls of water and crushed up granola bars. He doesn't look at her, much less eat or drink what she brings him. My wife and I do – honestly we do – admire her over-sized, adolescent heart. God knows we don't have hearts like hers anymore. But, still, we wish she wouldn't feed him.

The monkey with cymbals sends shivers down our television screen. We wear pillows like earmuffs. He skips our CDs and vinyl. Dust claps out from the corners of the drywall. The refrigerator judders, blends oil and vinegar, keeps the dregs of ketchup from settling at the bottom of the bottle. My daughter asks what color the baby's eyes are. She holds the bars of the crib quiet, as light steals through the shades. The baby stops crying, blinks several times. Her eyes are as gold: gold as the tiny dancer in the music box, twirling on the nightstand, to a song we hope will go on playing forever.

Chariot: Eulogy for a Paramour by Shome Dasgupta

She would come up from behind and put her arm around my neck and press me against her body to give me this hug, this hug, like the world disintegrated and all that was left was us two floating in space between dust and stars.

She would whisper in my ear, as she would place her other arm around my stomach; I could never understand what she was saying, because she was speaking so gently, like a dying dog, but I would close my eyes and nod, slightly. She knew I couldn't hear her, but she knew I understood her. She was a lullaby. She wasn't a dream. She was just a kite in a vacuum; she was the great disappearing act of the century.

She's gone now. And I'm in bed--in room 802-- staring at the wall, making figures against the dull white, out of shadows of my imagination. Trying to get away from it all, but it is all right here, embedded between the intestines of my brain. I see her swimming towards the curtain, in a red bathing suit, with her hair splashing against the Monet painting and the thermostat. She was a horrible swimmer. Doggy-paddled mainly, but now that she's gone, she's like a dolphin.

I can just look at my palm, and see her dancing along the thin crevices, swerving her body around, but never losing control, but always staying on the lines, always cutting on the line, always coloring between the lines.

I close my eyes now, and see ourselves among the dust and stars again. These memories are not as vivid though, not as alive. They slowly diminish into a pile of ashes resting on my stomach. I close my eyes even harder, concentrate, focus, remind myself to buy some Ginko, and clench the blanket so hard, my fingers pierce the cloth.

Meaning of Life # 35 by Sean Lovelace

“Property owners who have a pool are required to have a fence around that area.”
Munley, Munley, & Cartwright, P. C.
the undersigned hereby revokes this
the undersigned acknowledges

the romance

of kidney-shaped pools
(useless 80% of the time)

advice to all: mind the dagger. the shaft, the fluid apology. mind a landlocked imagination. (having a friend with a pool is preferable to owning

a pool [also true with sailboats]). mind backstabs/strokes, going to bed bored, bygone beauty. other b words.

for example: broaching

the romance of chlorine, aquamarine, high-shrub humidity/visibility, sex underwater (not as fun as may seem), floating on pink raft with beverage

for example: bourbon

useless:

vows

pennies

glassware

advice

clutches

tv

waves

wavelets

therapy

silver or gold

rings

slender

(clean) kitchen, skin, suffering (clean for sake of clean)

break

admiration

—or diet soda/seeping thoughts/rain

gutters/landscaped water

fall

shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

(some bird circling)

We said: what is love? It thrashed. We dove in. We read self-help. We tried. We read glossy magazine. We read poetry and asked, is it waving, is it drowning? It panicked. We asked, Is it a good swimmer? No, a good swimmer is lips, larynx—open words; sometimes cleavage or kissing spine bumps/arches of. Then will it tread? No, treading is lungs, of honesty. Why do you grimace? The thing lifeguards use—what is it? Lotion? No not lotion. A shepherd's crook? Yes, a shepherd's crook. Ah! A love of language. Even as everything spins out wrong, goes over (frayed), under (cracked), and so, language—could it save us?

(dive)

(the deep end)

the undersigned doesn't think so.

Debriefed, Believed by David Erlewine

The Nigerian boys who kidnap me must think I'm like them. While I'm white, blonde, 33, a Peace Corps vet, I'm also 5'2", 129, little peach fuzz, soft skin.

They teach me to shoot at cans, dogs, small bodies, larger ones. I nod often; I sever hands, a foot; I plot escape.

I am rescued, debriefed, believed, transferred to DC, given a cubicle near a window, handed a Peace Lily, told to log human rights violations.

Little hands begin dancing in the reflection off my computer screen. Our IT guy, Jamie, says he'll look into it.

The new computer contains far fewer hands. My peace lily disappears. Thankfully, only my logging skills are deemed mad.

I am promoted. I forget.

I excel.

Mr. X in House Slippers by Zachary C. Bush

I.

During one of his many manic fits, the old man [Mr. X] had gone and planted 147 cabbages in his cramped backyard, because he had recently lost all sexual desire for his wife [Mrs. X] who cannot even begin to comprehend her husband's many eccentric fascinations [fetishes].

II.

Whether or not you knew his age/hometown/eye color/food allergies, and whether or not you knew of his great admiration for the illustrators of children books, and whether or not you knew of his algebraic formula– he does have one, copyrighted, that is customized to equal his middle name– in the end, it doesn't matter much to him...

What is most significant, to him, is that you are acutely aware of the diverse [oh-so-extravagant!] personalities constantly emitted from his nose, arms, and toes.

III.

Alone in his garage, usually around Midnight, when Mr. X laughs, it sounds like green Guam sand [Raytheon Co. microwave oven (1946) --- white oak acorns --- George Foreman Grills © ---newborn babies] burning.

Rip Me Apart by Barry Graham

for Randall Brown

Here it comes – the all of it. She'll come home to find out what's gone, the something her husband can no longer name. The door blew shut. Maybe we just lean against each other, baby cheek to baby cheek, waiting for the stars, and maybe this time the door never opens and my mother never strides toward the willow tree and I don't un-alight from the branch and disappear back into what-if world, far away from Annie Rydell, just there like the stars, to give the world its wonder. And I could tear into her, anatomize her, rip apart her heart and still find nothing for myself. We both want to live.

*

I wish he had found me that night with his wild line drives, picked me up and carried me home. She's dressed, driven away and remembering her childhood, those awful folded bodies that come to define her. And when the dreams of the men with their bloody holes haunt Corey, he fights them off with this moment, the pink sky, the leathery hands, the two good guys and their walk into the far-off sunset. I always counted – she never knew how much. They laughed forever after about that blown-up rubber, Ned's frozen terror, and Dottie, angry, because she had been close, real close. I've got nothing, Jack. Nothing.

*

Maggie answers, then opens her mouth and feeds our baby's desire. Alex waves to me as the ball rolls by. It's okay now to rub her chest, to bury myself in it, to kiss her scars. Because you look at your wife, your wife on the wooden chair with her dark glasses and her head buried in books about chestnut hair blowing in the sea breeze and endings where even dead people get together and find each other, your wife who never looks up to see her son running toward the ball rather than away from it and her husband throwing each successive pass with a little more zip into his chest. Everyone will know. Both how little and how much of him rises and falls, how, beyond any imaginings, the world will break his heart.

Old Friends by Lydia Copeland

What will come to me in the night? Your old haircuts, miniature scissors by the sink, the shape of your body on the edge of the bathtub reading my letters while I sleep, the bow of your head. Sometimes I blackened fish in the pan with a squeeze of lemon, and you took it to the table, sat neatly at your plate. Straight as a Roman soldier with a napkin in your lap. Your mother would hug me too tight, tell me you were her favorite child, slide money into my purse for our dinners. On weekends we would drive through the night and the pines and the summer to her house, passing the Chinese restaurant, the chemical company that sudded up the rivers. You mother was a burst of sentences at the front door. You rolled your eyes.

There was a dog found in the park still clean and soft from bath. Your mother had made it her new baby and tied Christmas bells around its neck. Back home we'd go out with your friends. Everyone had beer and wine except for us. We had water. Or Coke. All the women would warm up. Their faces flushed. Their hands touched their hair, their lips, buttons. I would watch, unable to steal away, while they sat on your lap, sipped from your straws. Old friends, you'd say, and you'd re-light the table candle, kiss everyone on the cheek.

Remonstrance Back by Conor Robin Madigan

I like it because it's you, you say again from over the recovered couch to the recovered chair from alleys run down puddle after puddle, idle wasted time in dumpster dove days you enjoyed as, time with him is time not alone. Love's The Daily Planet, it was. And now the odd words of iceman's ice melted and how wild I'd thought Love's story came out of California's lean streets, insane reverb saturated Sundays and drums and melody you can't quite get, but hum from the end of your abysmal childhood to my completely shit, young adulthood. Not the types to look ahead, and your age considered my every moment torture, we ignore each instance. By staring so adamant, as to dry our eyes, at this our waned moment, as it hates to keep us sat, to stand us straight.

Nude by Liz Hall

Draw the point like this, see: two diagonal lines come together. I am Kate and I am four and my brother is teaching me how to draw a heart. I understand the top part, two rounded humps, but my fingers cannot make the pencil make two diagonal lines come together. The lines soften against my will, curving into a smooth parabola. My heart is not a heart at all. On paper, it becomes something that I hate. It is wrong, it is ugly. My brother executes two perfect half circles and one perfect tip connecting them. You'll get the hang of it, he says. Just keep practicing.

Open your heart to me, baby. I hold the lock and you hold the key. I am Kate and I'm nine and my mom is singing Madonna in a short psychedelic dress. She is in the bathroom gluing the blue ceramic pieces of our toothbrush holder back together. It used to be attached to the wall just beneath the mirror. For one month the ceramic pieces lay on the counter untouched. For one month we had to keep our brushes in a plastic cup. I am nine but I understand why she leaves them there. I am nine and supposed to be big, but I still feel sick inside when I think about the way his face looked in the bathroom mirror as he raised his balled fist.

You need to open your mouth more, like this. I'm Kate and I'm 13 and Daniel is teaching me how boys and girls kiss. I understand when Daniel tells me there is a good way and a bad way to kiss. But I really think for boys like Daniel, there can only be good and great kisses. I try to widen my mouth like I'm at the dentist. But my jaw locks against my will, rejecting Daniel's eager tongue. Kissing Daniel is not like the movies. It is rigid, it is ugly. There is shiny spittle on our chapped lips and my greasy forehead smudges Daniel's glasses. Daniel says we can try again some time. You know, get some more practice in.

I think you should go. If nothing else there will be free booze, right? I'm still Kate at 16 and my dad is getting remarried. My cousin Trish says I should go since he is my Dad, after all, and he's the one I have to ask for college money. My mom does not say it but I know she wants me to stay home – One, because we are Catholic and they do not have an annulment. Two, because she drinks beer these days when she never did before. The mental list of pros and cons sits in my brain. But it does not look pretty and ordered, and it does not help.

Your arms are so tight man, loosen it up. I am Kate and 18 and my college roommate is teaching me guitar. I want to be like Grace Slick, Janis Joplin, Melanie. Riley, my roommate, says these women speak to her soul. A lot of things speak to Riley's soul: the poets in her hefty Romantic literature anthology do a lot of soul-speaking. Also, baby penguins, vanilla chai tea, Wes Anderson films, and most Pre-Raphaelite portraits. I try to let the instrument in my lap speak to my soul the way Riley does, but blisters are beginning to rise on my fingertips, and I'm working through a calculus problem in my head. Besides, my rigid strumming sounds off, sounds ugly no matter how hard I try. And I really don't want to practice anymore.

A Quick Note on Living Symbolically (And Its Terrible Alternative) by Peter Schwartz

I've caught myself, caught myself living symbolically.

The first (symbol) was an impenetrable
orange in a cage of omens; I was thirsty,
but don't remember

my thirst, I remember my orange, or what
should have been. The second, seems.
It was an invitation, but there

was nowhere left. I put on sunglasses
and wrestled my furniture. I lost three
times before I

realized. The next was a crowbar, an excuse
for the shot of quicksand most of us
take nightly. The next was

a padlock against sunlight. I poured juice
into a vase and drew a fish on my arm, wished it
was a plate. I remember it

cooking, but forget the heat. Guess fire
changes everything, but I'd like a second guess.
The next was always the

next, but truth is there isn't any
last image or symbol, not in this poem or
any, this is only a little god-

game in a wet sandbox, a raking over a few
verbs and nouns I've summoned be-
cause I had to, because I

couldn't stand another second of
living without symbols.