

## M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e T e n

[ words by Gena Mohwish, David Erlewine, Eileen Escabar, Len Kuntz, Neila Mezynski, Adam Moorad, Grant Loveys, Zachary C. Bush, Andrew Borgstrom, Kirsty Logan, Audri Sousa, Michael G. Donkin, Howie Good, Amber Sparks, Michael Hessel-Mia, Kuzhali Manickavel, Tasia Hane-Devore, & J. Bradley ]

### Thoughts by Gena Mohwish

my eyes are heavy from emitting sadness due to the fact that i cannot tell whether or not there is an infinite number of ways to express love to someone. maybe there is only an infinite number of ways to express hate. i have exhibited such a large number of them that i am beginning to think that is the case.

why do you still feel alone?

there should be more effort in guaranteeing that people will not get hit by trains. at any given time, a person can jump and become non-existent. i have thought extensively about doing this. please enact more effective methods of prevention when it comes to people committing suicide by train.

with you, there is no death. without you, there is nothing but death.

these incessant scratching noises make me feel uneasy about things. it goes on and on until i finally drift into unconsciousness, where life is inside my head even more so than when i am awake. regardless, the images created by my mind will never stop plaguing me. they ultimately do not care what state of consciousness i am in.

i hope you heard me when i mumbled that when you die, everything will go with you. because it will.

### Who Will Ugly Him by David Erlewine

My wife says our son is too beautiful for this world. She writes this in her journal, knowing I read it.

I jot next to it, "Stop acting like you." Later, when they are asleep in bed together, I move around the house, picturing those who will ugly him. I fall asleep in the basement, picturing Van Gogh's chopped ear, how they say he contained too much beauty. At breakfast, I cover my son's ears in muffs, clip his nails, bind his thumbs and index fingers. I cover his eyes with my crisp toast. Apricot jelly dribbles down his chin. I shush my wife.

He nods at his bowl of oatmeal. I hold it up to his lips, watch them burn.

### Rachel Texts Me a Picture of Her Prom Dress by Eileen Escabar

I'm lying in bed when Rachel texts me a picture of her prom dress. We haven't spoken since I grabbed her ass at the Brillobox, and I wonder if there's been a mistake. She looks good, though. Her hair's longer than I remember. Redder, too. She's standing in front of the mirror, and her dress, a blue baby doll with hip ruffles, is partially obscured by the flash of the camera.

### Luna Child by Len Kuntz

Randall and I are a new pair, a couplet, a duvet only we're not, we're vermin, rodents, yet Randall is so, so handsome with those yoke-yellow eyes spilling out in the moonlight sunny-side up, tears of grease runny at the sides of his scabrous and grinning face.

If we were better thieves we'd powder our pelts and have our claws sharpened but there's something to be said for certain swiftness and spontaneity. The Nazi's stole Jew gold and the Europeans pilfered Inca land so who am I to hold a grudge with you, the cannibal who took my heart and ate it while it still throbbed, a Sloppy Joe dribbling through your webbed fingers?

Before I was part possum and rat, I swam in the world's greatest bodies of water and I flew atop frost-encrusted cloud cover over continents and receding, piss-warmed seas. Under the open eye of the moon, people paddled across the rippling, spackle-soaked waves and waited for a word from me, but instead I turned to you, you, and found your mouth as raw as steaming liver, your eyes jackknives. On your breath alit the woven stench of revenge, a wasteful red spillage.

All this happened not so long ago. There are storage carts and photo albums, movie reels. Just last week in someone's garbage I found an old celluloid film strip coiled like comingled sins or man-made tree roots—preposterously entwined plastic. While gnawing with a workman's pace, a fresh-faced image of you reflected off the chin of the moon and you squinted or winked at me in still, and I thought, how brilliant. Then: but of course.

Tonight the air is burst with melon and sugar and muddied with pixilated fireworks. The streets all play brassy horns and lewd jazz with smoke-singed, topless notes meant to coax the bright-bellied lady to climax and birth.

There'll be no Pitocin drip.

Gleaming ethereal, Day-Glo lemon lime, she is bloated and ornery but not giving a Fuck either way because she has been here since Moses, just look. Her veins are trails are stories are visible even from where you're sitting, look again-- see the plum-blue river curl?

The mound is advanced. She's carrying high. Tangle two strings in front of the pelvis and see. It should be a boy.

Tomorrow the sun will come up, and the next day too, but in the night, always when the rest are dull or ditched or dead, I'll watch. I'll be waiting. You'll see how strong I can hold this one big love.

#### Raucous Sculptor by Neila Mezynski

Head, arms, hands, feet, in a bucket, waiting to get born. Come together nicely, nicely or slam into each other, like two trains colliding. Maybe me, my first dance, a raucous waltz, nicely, nicely, at gun point. The all over the place grandma's not quite done yet quilt or tip toeing up to an unmade bed ready to shoot your brother if he doesn't get up.

The sculptor, doing his raucous waltz of stacking them born.

#### Malchus by Adam Moorad

Lamb dreams a dream. He is in a chair having his hair cut. It's raining outside. He looks at his reflection in a mirror. Sees a window behind him. He stares. Feels nauseous. Watches rain hitting the window, running down glass, disappearing. A maroon smock engulfs Lamb's body. The hairdresser holds a pairs of scissors. Her name is Rita. She works the scissors around Lamb's head. Slow then fast then slow again. She is a large woman with small feet. Dominican. Lamb thinks all Dominican women are genetically

predisposed this way. He feels a hair on his eyelash. He blinks. He blinks again. Less nauseous. Still nauseous. Rita snips. The blades scrape together with magical crystal inertia. A clump of hair falls on Lamb's smock. He sees rolls off onto the floor. He shivers. He pictures Rita inadvertently cutting off one of his ears. He closes his eyes. Sees one of his earlobes floating in midair, plummeting towards the floor. There is blood. It looks like honey against the maroon smock. Lamb presses his tongue against his teeth. Tastes something sweet. Opens his eyes. Sees an earlobe on the floor in a pile of hair. His. Lamb looks around. Listens. Dreams he is dreaming. Thinks he can hear better without his ear. He looks at Rita's fingers then her legs. His thighs begin cramping violently. The pain feels good. Rita messes Lamb's hair then combs it. She messes and combs again. There is a curl in the center of Lamb's forehead. He feels an immense amount of hatred for the curl. Veins bulge from his temples. He becomes sick. Rita spins Lamb around, turning him away from the mirror. She stares at him. Tells him she has just experienced a grim premonition. Her lips do not move. Her mouth hangs open. Her teeth are small, yellow, and genetically predisposed this way. Lamb looks at the window then at the scissors. His thighs burn and twitch. Rita is silent but somehow able to communicate with Lamb telepathically. She says she has the supernatural ability to forecast cancer in people. She has done this on several occasions in her native country and has been correct. She has saved some people's lives, but has lost others. She refuses to lose another. Rita says she cannot lose Lamb. His business. His hair. Lamb feels beads of sweat coalesce around his eyebrows. He becomes angry. He looks at Rita. Feels confused. He sees a clump of hair resting on his smock above his thigh. The clump begins to crackle and smoke. The smoke smells like honey. He moves his legs. Dislodges the clump. Watches the clump fall to the floor. Flaming. He looks at Rita. Her eyes are wide with childlike alarm. She says the word growth. The word inoperable. The word sorry. Lamb imagines dying and feels dead. He thinks he always knew he had cancer. Knew he was gradually developing a cancerous condition that would threaten his life. A growth. In his brain. His mind. Materializing. Dematerializing. Rita explains a holistic treatment plan designed to inhibit the spread of carcinogenic molecules within the body. Lamb looks around. Sees the window. The rain. Rita says something in Spanish and Lamb cannot understand. He coughs. He coughs again. He cannot stop coughing. Rita stares at Lamb. Senses his confusion and begins to laugh. She hums. Her lips are still. Lamb watches her. Adjusts himself beneath the smock. Looks at the ceiling. At his ear. Feels doomed. Closes his eyes. Opens them. Closes them. Keeps them closed. Rita is still holding the scissors in her hand. The blades grind. Magical. Crystal. Inertia. Lamb. Nauseous. Shivering. He wishes Rita could cut a hole in skull and cut out his cancerous growth with her scissors. Magically. Rita turns Lamb around so he is facing the mirror again. He looks at himself. Feels aesthetically inadequate. Half his head is cut. Lamb has the desire to ask Rita to shave his head on the assumption he has cancer. He thinks it seems like the right thing to do. He doesn't say anything and tries to relax. A telephone on the wall begins to ring. Rita walks over to the wall. Answers the phone. Lamb looks at the phone against Rita's ear. The chord swinging. The rain falling. His legs throbbing. Face itching. The smock feels heavy across Lamb's shoulders. He tries to breathe. Rita talks in Spanish for fifteen minutes. Lamb can feel tiny pieces of hair sticking to his face and neck. He tries to blow air upward, across his face. He blows again. He closes his eyes. Dreams he daydreams. Sleeps restlessly, unable to satiate the desire to scratch.

#### Close, like air by Grant Loveys

Our boundaries are immense, unfathomable, too distant for vision, too thick to wrap arms around. We are the poles of another planet - two pins tacking a skin of earth to the hot iron core. Holding on. Digging our fingers in as the seams split around the whorls of our fingertips. The peaks of our bodies sewn together, grown familiar, along the long expanse of thigh and the chest's hard shelf, but still distant enough to warrant a sigh. Just a brief exhalation which tangles in the hair on the crown of your head, like a kite speared on the point of a hooked moon beaming down on the child below.

So we search for one another. Excavate the years. Bring up the bones of what we've built and tumble them into a pile, like tea leaves left after a soothing cup, to read what's written about where we went wrong. The round end of your ankle, your ribs like an empty birdcage whose fluttering beast has long since flown - they speak in their arrangement, mingled among my long femurs and a handful of hammered teeth. We listen

only to find unease in the speech, that maybe our boundaries are as we feared. And that we can find each other only in the places we cannot look - the pink skin beneath a scab, the heat behind the eyelids.

Struck by Zachary C. Bush

The man watches the silver sky shed  
hundreds of doves over his land,  
like unwanted babies tossed from tall buildings,  
corkscrewing through the clouds, until brittle beaks  
and bones break against the surface of the lake.

I Do Pale by Andrew Borgstrom

Your balloons were floating and popping and dropping and mad happening. Glad to touch your balloons, to ride your balloons, to be among your balloons. Thanks for the balloons and the frosting, for the warm canned sandwiches and the tit milk. You rode away on the balloons from my sky, and the sky followed you, so I propped my ladder on your blackness, climbed to the top rung, stepped off, and stuck to your absence like felt.

If you returned and asked what I was doing, I would tell you that there were two ladders initially. That one ladder leaned on the sun and another ladder leaned on some clouds, that the people climbed the ladders and brought down the sky, that one of these people returned to her house with a sun and the rest returned with some clouds, and that I walked on the rungs of the ladders like abandoned train tracks in the middle of the night.

Untitled by Kirsty Logan

#1.

and then darker, a sad ending.

#2.

short nails hard knuckles, hands for holding bike handles drum sticks  
school textbooks chalk, and maybe she'd have chalk on her palms when  
she kissed me, chalk dust in my hair, slick soft hard smooth, and the  
feel of this youngold girlboy on top of me, her hair pale as a rabbit,  
and she's called out to me twice now and still I'm here at this  
kitchen table, eating jam and toast, writing about her. tick tick  
unrequited moonlit poem.

#3.

maybe a rockstar - pink guitar winged hair - talking about tattoos to  
magazines, slumped backstage on couches smelling of boysweat with  
groupies pawing and feeling sad and drunk, and then saying to  
magazines about this new concept of Feminism so that groupies would  
offer me intellectualism instead of tit, and then maybe I'd realize  
that I prefer tit after all, somewhere warm to slide my calloused  
fingers so I could show them how fast I can play a solo.

#4.

speculum albumen memoriam. everyone ignores the swooning woman –  
swooning for what they've done, the smells of warm dog and animal  
skins and the hot dry earth, the itch of ferns, and she's waking or  
sleeping with her love looming over her, pulled away by two other  
women - nymphs, tempters - but still she reaches back to touch that  
soft arm, pale as bread dough, before she is pulled away and the woman  
is left alone to swoon, pollen in her throat, wrapped in a stranger's  
clothes, with the dog stepping delicately over her leg.

#5.

maybe it should have been a ghost story about a children's book.

Melanin by Audri Sousa

it is milk and bark for supper again and in the fields the children's eyes swirl as magma. learning to carry  
their color. the sun trying to gauge how best to keep them from leaking onto the pleated corn husk blanket  
under their feet. the potency of dye. the children with scales measuring how much light is still outside them.  
the mother tells a story scored by cicadas. milk and bark clinking in cups and plates, taking the soundforms  
of their containers. the children listening. the father in the yard burying a hot gun in soil.

the father in the bedroom, having found knitted skin shed by the milkman. having found among his  
bedclothes something unfamiliar. having smelled cream gone rancid. the mother loops yarns into warmth,  
full of knowing. the mother as a vine. the children running in the fields, the children versus the sun, the  
children after the marble of their eyes. the father, after sweet absinthe swallowed through glass-bitten teeth,  
having shot the milkman in the chest, having buried him with his cart and bottles. the milk bottles taking  
root overnight, pushing through amniotic soil, sprouting in the dark behind the house. yielding by morning  
a wax-leafed tree dripping white puddles of its own lactate. the father hacking at the tree with an axe. the  
tree resisting uprooting.

the children clean their plates of milk and bark. the mother finishes the story. entropy finishes the mother.  
the children sleep and dream of kites, of boats made of giant hollowed apples. the cicadas sleep and dream  
of molting, of harvest, of milk. the gun in the yard taking root, sprouting ugly fingers, yielding another tree  
whose fruit was bullets. the bullets in bloom, littering the garden, choking the parsnips. next morning the  
early father, hacking at the tree with an axe. the tree resisting uprooting. the bullets ripening and falling in  
piles, unrelenting. avalanches of bullets glinting in sunlight. the mother noticing the milkman is late.

the tree resisting. the father lets go of the axe, plucks a bullet from the tree, lets go of his knees. the children  
full of melanin glinting in sunlight. the mother washes rainbows from the sink, dries her hands. the sun  
made of children in the sky. the accidental, sprouting sun with eyes hard as marble. the mother behind the  
house discovering a tree in a pool of white. smearing a finger in its oozing red sap, warm as ginger.  
wringing a white wax leaf into her mouth. the texture, the taste familiar.

Family Portrait by Michael G. Donkin

The brother is here. The brother was bad the brother badly injured the insect. The brother hit. The brother  
ate bread. The brother bothered me. The brother made the bed. The brother teared for an hour. The brother  
bled. The brother got better. The brother triumphant. The brother big. The brother taking. The brother  
rubbing two stones together. The brother eating French pastries in the backyard. The brother assaulting a  
maniac. The brother afraid of mirrors. The brother seeing shapes in the darkness of the room. The brother  
understanding numbered jerseys. The brother attacking mother with a perfume bottle. The brother  
remembering. The brother against opinions other than his own. The brother opens. The brother a king. The  
brother robs. The brother makes tea.

The father stares out at a lake.

A willow he spots. A dragon on a leash.

A puny monad. A comet. The father's imagination fizzles.

His belly smiles. He metamorphoses into a gourd. A memo.

The wife wends through the gallery. The wife a secret. The wife a willful bastard. The wife exhausted. The wife reading. The wife, truly. The wife expressionless. The wife to the father. The mother and the wife. The mother who leavens. The mother who leaves.

The sister executes. The sister dislocates her dresses. The sister blends baleful colors. The sister hates daisies. The sister crosses legs repeatedly and is gleeful. The sister reprimanded. The sister sits still. The sister alleged to have eaten Peter's cupcake in the classroom on Alec's eighth birthday. The sister harangued. The sister avenges. The sister dreams of fishes. The sister hides belongings in the pine forest. The sister watches the roaring of a boil. The sister mesmerizes a bystander.

#### The Last Fire Engine From Hell by Howie Good

1

Fire splashed up at us. What looked like snow or ashes were scraps of paper on which good deeds had been recorded. The fireman remembered it as a turquoise building, with its pants around its ankles. Someone had covered the holes in the screen with electrical tape, but night still got in. We held each other. The fireman raised his ax. No amount of coaxing could get the canary lying on the bottom of the cage to sing.

2

As soon as I enter you, monarchies and condors, music for pieces of wood. There's only one law, you say, the law of unintended consequences, but say it so softly I only imagine I hear it. And then we untangle, and the migrants on the hill, who had paused to watch a cloud shaped like Asia Minor, return to gathering windfall apples under blind, embittered branches.

#### Our Mechanically Separated Story by Amber Sparks

We are ready to climb down. Inked thick with black marker and cloaked in baggy uniforms, we live in trees of iron. We throw our wrenches down at the wretches who made the world.

We make our way over sandbars of soot, through tangled metals like a jungle gym grown wild. We hack through a forest of thorns and gears and pulleys. We climb over the steady graves of books, concrete dumped fast, protective coating over letters and figures. The noise is tremendous; we hear little but the steam and clanking, cluttered storm.

We do not arrive. We will never arrive.

We seek shelter. We swing ourselves up into trees of iron. We find tools and televisions and time clocks, and turn our attention to the tasks at hand.

Watermelons by Michael Hessel-Mial

The last thing Frida Kahlo did before she died was a picture of watermelons

The last thing Diego Rivera did before he died was a picture of watermelons

I am cutting a watermelon into jutting, angular pieces

I am imagining a woman naked from the waste down, in high heels,

firing equidistant watermelons from her vagina

against a backdrop of stars and planets,

while a synthesized waveform plays softly

can I think about writing a poem about watermelons

while imagining a watermelon the size of the universe tearing apart

you will like this watermelon, it has no seeds

no spitting is required

I apologize for the lousy cutting job, the knife wasn't very sharp

I am used to mostly drinking coffee and not getting enough sleep

Firang by Kuzhali Manickavel

We break everyone like bottles, our slut hands warped and fierce like white metal bands. Then we apologize. We size our words in careful white lines, explain the stains in our teeth the bloodybaskets the bastardbitches the cowcunts. We are armed with regional anxiety. We know exactly what you're talking about.

We can laugh at our language, the bandage around our tongues that makes us othercaste, retarded, gay. Call us firang, callus firang, drag us to your TV sets and make us drink your bittersweet teas like we have always been here. Open our chests and see the runted sprays of tuberklawsis spill down like black lightning. We are all going to die from this. But you will be ok.

The Best Damage is Not Skin by Tasia Hane-Devore

He traveled without green under his hat, star-vacant dumbstruck by the odds pure survival and wandering eyes, whatever that means, a cliché in the best of times, the best of times the best of times a man in the best of times ties you up and taxes you that rope so slick it lets you shimmy from under it and run, the chase is the true (though hold onto your hat sir because here comes the knife in deep and twisting), and I didn't think to ask what it meant to be without a roof, proverbially speaking that is a proverbial roof though my

speech was true to life, he always was surrounded voices forever longing for some kind of action as voices are, smell that green green grass, and he took this space making all things specious in the dark so close your eyes and reach for the genitals: the important parts are veiled allusions. The small soft pink pouch to squeeze and please like rubber, it's like hiding something in a safe place your keys a knife the magic your mother gave you to keep you clean, she smoked like a spitfire pig, the magic she tried to tell you worked for her though you know keen as a ballpoint pen that she was as close to a junky as you'd ever met in the books you hid under your mattress, this is a safe place, on second thought drop it and no one gets hurt, a safe place that is lost as soon as it's found first and forgotten.

He put down roots, this man sly slick like a fox like rocks sharp and jagged on the shore of pretending, you are interested in doing something with your life, roots in fallow ground though close enough to go after them and dig, spring, winter, memory of distance close close close a mantra he told it close he held it in shuttered his body to himself, his body gone only empty folds shook in the wind, he didn't care except what to do with it, cremation is always an option, little man, and there's no telling the pock marks and scars in dust we look like any other bones, so he took the idea home and planted it above ground the only place it might grow exposed to the elements he would be this tenebrific fever makes it okay to skin stretch cover all of him finally and deep always waking in the morning stain of learning a body its small and what is burned there, a clearing, these limbs that don't fit properly and much more to the point a particular one branching out between the thighs smothered with an empty the feeling of missing misting minting a small jewel caught between the teeth so much the prize, a fluttering in the mouth across the tongue like a flame, memory steps hard with its heel, tries to quiet instead, this: small red smell of marginalia, but this is more facely to put front and recognizable to wear again the call of skin, a sky vacant of stars and light but full of gorgeous nevermind and the possibility of when.

The Kama Sutra of Hansel & Gretel by J. Bradley

Throwing you down stairwells  
makes for a great aphrodisiac.

Those aren't bruises;  
they are black splotches  
your orgasms leave  
so you can't abandon them  
in the woods.

I will pick you up, hold you  
until we make a great oven  
together. Let's see how  
our practice children taste.