

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e T h i r t e e n

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And Then There Will Be Field; Or, George Jetson and the Platypus; Or, The Living Room by Geoff Schmidt

1. A smudge of a person in a smear of a room. There's light and sound and then there isn't.
2. George Jetson is in a living room listening to music. Then he turns off the music and turns out the light and goes to bed.
3. George Jetson is listening to the Beatles's White Album and playing Spore on a laptop in his living room. A platypus walks in the front door. It sits down next to him. This music sucks, the platypus says. Don't you have any Devo? George Jetson thinks the music off. When he closes his eyes, the lights go out.
4. George Jetson and a platypus are taking turns playing Spore on a laptop and listening to Smashing Pumpkins and Korn. After a while, George Jetson gets sleepy and jetpacks off to bed. The platypus plays until the planet stage, at which point it loses interest. It wonders what it would be like to be the first man to wear pants. It walks out into the night, never to return.
5. There was a dog named Astro once that talked through the day, and a family, but that was a million years ago, or from now. George Jetson had a tail once, too, or an ancestor did. Some nights in the living room he hears phantom barking so he turns on his iPod and listens to music until he falls asleep with the lights on.
6. There's a platypus in a living room not listening to music. There's nobody there to feed it. After a while, it wanders down a cul de sac and dies.
7. George Jetson and a platypus are playing Dance Dance Revolution in the living room. They are supergood friends. Their insides are like deep stone wells of devotion. They dance to Devo. When they're exhausted and happy they eat ice cream and read comics. In time, rubyred energy beams come zapping out of George Jetson's eyes. The platypus shrugs and wings unfold from its shoulders. They put on costumes and save the world over and over again, then go to bed.
8. The living room was built by Adam Jetson in a house he built by hand with his wife Rachel the day before she delivered their first child, her belly swollen and her hammerstroke true. Before that there was meadow and before that there was forest and before that there was ocean. Someday there will be wreckage and timber and then there will be rot and then there will be field and then forest and then ocean. Right now there is living room, and human being and platypus flicking through like moths, like meteors.
9. George Jetson is in a living room with a platypus. They're listening to music on a very old cabinet stereo. The platypus stays up all night. Sometime after midnight, George Jetson heads to bed. He leaves his boots on. They drift up to the ceiling and he awakens upside down above the bed. The platypus is curled up on his pillow. George Jetson has never slept so well in his life.
- 9.2. He's never slept so poorly in his life, ever since he started sleeping with the platypus.

9.3. They sleep well together, spooningly so, curled in on each other, fur and skin, bill and butt.

10. God invented the living room about twelve days ago. He aged the timber eighty years and scarred the floorboards and cracked the windows and endusted and begrimed the corners and windowsills.

11. George Jetson in his supercool jetboots hovers crosslegged in the middle of the livingroom. How long has he wrestled with this knot of feelings for the platypus dancing to Devo in his living room? It's a wrongness, a tangle, a wingflutter of the heart. Put on your secret agent hat and come to bed, George says. The platypus levels its blank stare at him. Unreadable and mysterious, it stops dancing and cocks its head. After a while, George scoops up the platypus and hoverboots it off to bed. The heart is a thousand birds lifting suddenly from a field in winter.

Government Subsidized Corn by Thomas Patrick Levy

'The Government Pays Your Uncle Not to Farm'

In Iowa your Uncle is outside with his dog, fighting a daylight raccoon. He shoots it inside out. You're in the kitchen gutting pheasant. You think: fingers cover the frost. He tells the dog to sit and says he doesn't grow any corn because the government pays him not to farm. The prairie grass failing like a weak deer. You think: bountiful moon. The crops no longer circle and dive like birds. I think we're in a wheat field. I can see two feet ahead and want nothing more than the smoke of your breath in my frozen ear. The raccoon lays there. Blood on the dog's lip. Your uncle walks to the stream. I stay with the mess, my ears ringing like a television left on through the night.

'I Do Not Want To Die Because of Corn'

I pretend we are alone. Watch the lights of California melt the stars away. We are a parking lot of byproducts. Cement walls everywhere. The corn ruining our breath. We drive hours away on 10% corn ethanol gasoline. At Vista Point we see there is nothing in heaven we want and watch Los Angeles suffer like a stray. I hold you hard while you dream of my heart coming apart like a frayed wire. There is nothing worth eating. We are a parking lot of ruined insides. I bleed open like a split fence and sleep with dirty hands.

'There is No Real Corn in California'

I can't stand checking nutritional facts. It's always a trick. The organic farms. There is no real corn in California. There is no diet that can keep you clean forever. Each night the head of a fish. Each night like a storeroom of rice and wheat. Your past is avocado-painted roads and my past is the Union Workers parting the Heartland with an interstate.

'The Paint on Your Toyota Camry is Made of American Corn'

The paint on your Toyota Camry is made of American corn and the car itself is recycled bottles and computer chips. The dangerous floor mat works like a noose. I can warn you about pedals but you are not a child. When I feel pressed against you I think: change brake pads. When I feel soft I think: carwash. One morning you will wake with rust beneath your eyes. You will resurface yourself, think about purchasing a sexier car. One morning I will come home with a brand new headache machine. You will think: anti-lock braking system; Mercedes-Benz.

'We Can't Consume All the Corn We Produce'

I buy you dinner because I imagine lingerie beneath your clothes. While we eat I think about the way sometimes your hair curves like leaves around your lips, about your bare legs moving against the cold

sheets. I imagine a surplus. I imagine feeding the starved. I want to wear you like a coat I carry into another field of corn. You say that we use corn in everything because we can't eat all the corn we have. You say that we are sinking, that we are a beat-down shed. I try not to spill ice water on your thighs and imagine that hunger does not exist while I pick the shell of a prawn from my teeth.

'Government Subsidized Corn is Crushing the Global Economy'

As I watch you undress Government subsidized corn is crushing the global economy. There is a song about this on the stereo. It goes on like a bag of empty cans. I've crushed each one and I too love being crushed. Like spice, like a mound of sand. I tell you this and then practice burying myself. In the evening I barely crawl into the deepest shadow of our yard. I dream of trucks backing into a garage. I dream beneath the porch in the dirt and watch these giant fists crushing grass like boots. The trucks are full of corn and gasoline and the gasoline is made of corn and oil. Do you feel my ruined soil? Do you see me battered, frail as meal?

'You Used to Scatter Corn Silk in the Grass for the Birds to Use the Build Their Homes'

This is the way we get to heaven. Walking carefully at night around the hot tub with toes curled like the rain. The television in your parents room flashing across the yard. The colors cutting through the silk we left in the lawn. This might be how they build their homes. Each toe like a kernel of corn. This is how we take off our clothes. The nests of silk so quiet. It hurts like sleep to build a home and most nights you are not this soft. When I whisper all you hear is wrinkled breaths, a photograph of numbers coming out of me like string.

Fable by Howie Good

A messenger arrived
from a country

colonized by magpies.
I have two sons, he said,

one whose name
means wolf

and one whose name
means laughter.

It felt like rain,
what's called

a baby's ear moon,
false angel wing.

They hanged him
in a cornfield.

The world is made
of tiny struggling things.

Forest Book by Ben Brooks

The man lit candles. His izba smelt of oil and meat and smoke and sweat. The man lit candles and settled himself in a wooden chair. The walls were of wood. There was dirt in the walls. There were small holes in the walls through which blue came. Blue fractured and spotted the man and his clothes. Specks of light in the bear skin over his shoulders. Pricks of white in the dents of his cheeks. The candles shook as he breathed. His breath made labyrinths in the air. Outside a wolf sang and the trees shifted epileptic. Wind from the ocean chased itself in circles round the shack. The shack held. The shack holds.

Atop the shack was a Sh. A blackened brass one the man had found led in dirt by the town. Thrown through a window by a girl who had kept her own hands. It was fixed there with orange nails. It shivered in the wind. It shivered but it did not collapse.

Before the man was a silver plate which had been already in the shack when he came. Around the scorched edges the prayer was written. The prayer even had been carved into the house's beams. The prayer was cut into the flagstones and into the bricks behind the fire. The prayer was cut over the frame of the door.

The man placed each hand flat upon the tabletop. He began the prayer. He said Sh, there have been planets and there have been suns. He pushed the heels of his hands into his eye-sockets. But we have always carried fire. He began to hit his feet against the stone floor. Keep away Oh so that I might in night watch the light. So that I might work to bottle it, build a library in my chest.

The man stopped his feet and took down his hands. He took up a knife and began to eat the slim cuts of fox and root that were before him. He drank from a small bowl of tea.

A cat from the town nudged through the izba door. The fur on its side was arranged in maps and it was toothless. In the town there were whole whale bones left in the streets but the cat came to the shack. It led and bent itself on the table by the man. The man pushed a sliver of meat toward it. He said Sh. He slid his fingers through the valleys behind the cat's ears.

When the food had been eaten the man went and sat cross-legged before the fireplace. The cat sat in the triangle of his legs. He struck a match and lit balls of paper and tucked them in-between the wood. While the fire grew the man warmed his hands on the cat's head. The cat submersed its face in the man's tea bowl. Sh the man said.

A small hand went to hit the door of the shack but the door was open and when the hand met it the man felt the wind beat against his back. He turned and saw a tiny girl. She wore a frock smeared with mud and had yellow dirt hair held on one side by blue ribbon and the other by old string. The girl ran to the man and looped her hand around his wrist. Come, she said. Please. What is it the man said. The girl said please.

The girl led the man out of his izba and down the track through the forest. We should have a torch the man said. The girl said the sky is not black. The girl was right. The ocean above them was deep but not dark. It lit the pine trees through which they ran. Two butter moons circled them. The girl whispered SH.

They turned from the track and passed between trunks. The grass scratched at their knees. Pollen clouds bloomed in their wake. The girl tugged at the man. She turned her inward eyes on him. She said hurry. Rivers of wind ran forward. They pulled the smell of dirt and bark.

Here the girl said. She dropped the man's hand. They were stood in a space between trees. A space of crab grass and dandelions and teams of blue pebbles. There the girl said. She extended one finger and drove it through the air at the centre of the clearing. The man saw it. An emptiness. A circle of black. Of nothing. NO the man said. The girl said is it starting? The man crouched and gathered twigs and pebbles from around his feet. He threw them into the circle. He watched them turn to nothing. NO the man said. NO. He pushed his hands into his eyes. He said the prayer. He said Sh, there have been planets and there have been suns. The girl heard him. Her voice jumped to his. But we have always carried fire. They began to hit their feet against

the grass. Keep away Oh so that I might in night watch the light. So that I might work to bottle it, build a library in my chest.

The man's voice had turned wet and the words of the prayer were mauled. He kept his hands against his eyes. Tears fell through the cracks between his fingers. The girl watched him. She threw the blue ribbon from her hair into the circle.

Eventually the man stood and shook the water from his hands. He held her with her head rested against his stomach. He moved his thumb up and down her cheek. Sh he said into her hair. Sh she said into his belly.

We should get you back to the town the man said. To your mother. He flicked tears from the corners of his eyes. He hitched the girl up on his back and felt her latch to him. She curled her legs around his chest and tied her hands around his neck and rested her face in his hair. As he ran the girl said it's starting isn't it? The man said nothing. He wondered how the girl had found the emptiness. He put it down to Sh.

When they reached the edge of the town the man lowered the girl from his back and to her feet. He said to her go to your mother and do not speak. He said lie in your bed and dream of colours. Tomorrow I will come into the town and tell them. Tonight let people sleep. Before the girl left she gestured to the man to lower his head and when he did she kissed his nose and said Sh. She said i'm scared. She turned and ran into the town.

For a while the man sat and watched lights in the windows of the town. He saw silhouettes kiss and drop away. He heard tiny laughs and prayers climb and dissipate. The cat slunk from the woods and climbed to his shoulder. The cat ran its tongue over the man's ear. The man laughed. The man said Sh.

There Was Only This Ever by Robert Kloss

All life resides in the inferno of this creature. All life sweltered within a humid maw.

Now all life and death heard within this creature and now a wild breath, now an air of lepers strewn and wandering, an ancient rattle of lepers dying in the forest, bodies diminished and fused with the loam, bodies devoured by dogs and flies already unraveling, cast from hospitals, lepers washed by boys and nuns on roadsides, the nightmares of what falls off, the breath of the creature become the white of lime, lepers flung from sacks and brimming the ditches, of fathers issuing their sons to the edge of what sweltered below, of father commanding Look, for the breath of the creature is the final commandment.

How often did we wait for you to vanish? How often did we know without you there lived no us?

This impossible throat, this elongated tomb and a death rattle much as a jangling of maniacs, a wandering tribe of deviants, hoarse whispering mispronounced names and calling to the soil, minds diminished and devoured by a thousand invisible worms, now an urge to murder with fingers, to ride pant-less and throbbing, to pull open and sleep within, now all the wolves of a forest dead and what a fine coil these ribs, what a fine death rattle these thousand bells and cathedrals, born into ruin, a thousand cathedrals and all life pronounced dust and wombs, and now always gone, into the dust and the forest of a thousand motley ghosts, gone and born into towers of ashes, gone save the last fade of the death clicking of the deathless creature, whose eyes light the abyss, a nuclear burst within the tar-dream of our oceans, and whose mouth becomes the final tomb, whose words become the vibration of all ruination, whose words become the tablets shook to dust, all dust now save the jangling of maniacs, gone to bone and rust, gone to the forest to watch and dream and await.

Now the far off drift of clotted eyes. Now a madness webbed from chloroform.

What teeth, this creature who leaned and sneered, who brimmed to the forest of its teeth, elongated with mother and father, rough bone and ash, a creature choking with the termination of cities, a creature filled within your skull, now no creature but the humid mountain of your dead, now no creature but what fumes with laughing gas, now none but those whispers in a voice born before life, who lost all within the obsidian of its shroud.

We thought you sank into its maw. We thought you gone to those caverns of this creature's belly and we thought finally.

Now, only this ever, murmuring the names of our dead, only this now of houses built and burning, only this confusion of rivers and seas, ever pools of oil, sweltering and obsidian. Now only this ever of temples gone to salt, of towers become sand and glass, now only this birth of a rough creature, gone insane with a thousand worms, invisible and spread, now only this ever of alligators yawning, of all life clotted and dying, now only this ever of teeth and confusion, of flies and oil, now only this, of bone and ash, of loam and tomorrow.

A Music Box is Binary by Carissa Halston

Its one zero one lilting zero one tune could be heard one one zero in a nursery, as well as tink-a-linking zero zero one one through the metal membrane of an ice cream truck.

The barrel one spins zero giving a trilling feeling one a lah-dee-dah pattern of, zero one one "That's the one zero song from my childhood that brings me one back to my zero zero zero one youth." There's method to the zero music, one one steppy jig, her graceful zero curtsy, dashing boxsteps in his stride. The counting stops at one and begins again anew, the code within its placement wherein zero can't be one. But is the music in the meter or the zero-oney math that brings about its cycle, and the dancing; zero one if it's math that makes the meter, not the zero one one tune, could we zero frame this pattern one around another sense? Could a one one zero silent box play music just as sweetly, shafts of light emitting through a slotted, spotted cylinder; a zero zero one zero one one one zero pattern against parchment towers surrounding candlelight?

I knew a guy who knew a guy who counted zeros out on his zero one thumbs and fingers, then his thumbs again. And this guy who knew my friend said that zero zero one could be counted one hand less than a deaf person's signs.

The Book of Kirk by C. L. Bledsoe

Kirk Cameron's pet monkey loves bananas. He's got a direct line to God: listen, the perfect curve reminiscent of a sheathed phallus, the fingers arc; the lips pucker just so to receive it. The exposed anus. It's in the bible: look it up the next time you're in a hotel. Kirk Cameron's pet monkey knows: it could be worse. There could be no bananas. Worse still, rational thought, an understanding of agriculture, fleas.

Mattress Factory Visit by Michael Crake

Bryan Cranston sat next to me on the bus to the Mattress Factory. He was singing "Life During Wartime." Maybe it was the mention of Pittsburgh, PA in the song. I describe the work of wax to my wife. "It's an inner space I haven't discovered." "It's transparent in its heat and effort." The weeds in three stages of life at the edge of the wall surpass the room. Would the visitors ever be partially coated in paraffin wax, and could this lead to a set of performances? Bryan is busy listening to the suspended speakers. "The music is frequently adjacent to the object in mediation." Cotton cloth was designed for the vendors in the courtyard. The building had made mattresses that were gathered and will be reused by an artist believing technique is an endurance of light and labor.

The Colloidal Structures of Dissolved Solids by Shawn Maddey

Would you like a silly string?

Yes, I say.

We spray like cats in heat, all over, til everything's all covered in neon yellow congealing children's shit, all our area marked. It was a bad idea that cost us a bad sum. But til then we sat in our nest building honeycombs and feeding off each other's wax and crying like bees in heat. We danced figure eights, pointing to pizza, rejecting the pollen – we made honey and wax and spat the spent crust all over the walls and it stuck to the string. Her eyes burned, and I traced her outline with my tongue.

Would you like a candle to read by?

Yes, she says.

I kneel to the floor and scrape my arms along, picking up wax and cigarette butts. The butts would make the filament to burn and I would pull them straight in a line. I would peel the wax from my arms and mold it with my body heat into a candle and the butt wick of the thing, burning, would snare my arm hairs caught in the wax, and the candle would have the fragrance of hog fat in great heat, rendering. My stomach growls, and I don't believe in the romance novels she reads.

Would you like a childbirth?

Yes, I say.

Her insides rattle around with used-up semen for months. She takes more to place inside herself, building some thing to be born, nurses her ten pound tumor with hormone and instinct juice dripping from pickles and pharmaceutical bottles. I make a crib from wasp husks fallen from the ceiling. I pull open her legs to place more inside of her, all of everything I want. There is a baseball, a book of marinade recipes and sauces. There is a piece of metal from a clock that I found on the floor, and I push it as far in as I can. There is a calligraphy set, the ink and nibs that I'd used to tattoo myself. She pulls it in. In the heat of the oven, everything comes out beautifully, like a miracle. We wipe our sweat on each other like Romans, and we tell her and me it is a real fucking miracle.

Would you like just us again?

Yes, she says.

Unconsciousness of an Adult Male Deity by Gregory Napp

Zeus was sleeping alone because his wife had gone out again, and he had this dream about horses in the snow. Clydesdales.

The animals weighed literal tons and moved like the earth, gravely, pulling rivers backward at a word. The weights they drew strained their harness, stretched it--creaks were audible--but their power was unchallenged.

One team was chuffing up a narrow mountain trail. Another team was coming down. They pricked their ears. The snow was soot-colored and trampled to mud ice. The men were barely looking, it was so cold. The drivers kept their chins down and their collars and their caps met over their eyes.

The horses sidestepped. Some of them tossed their manes, flanks glistening, eyes wide behind blinders. They snorted plumes of white. The wagons swayed as they passed, groaning. The wind blew. A hair couldn't fit between.

Zeus saw it from above. He'd read that an empty wagon pulls over for a loaded one, to let it pass, but that's not what happened. The teams swept along unharmed. They met later in the stables. They enjoyed vigorous rubdowns, helped themselves to the dry feed and chased it with clear water. They slept, and dreamt of spring plows and summer hay and sex.

In summer, they dreamt of men with saws hefting giant cubes of ice from a frozen lake up the mountain, and of closeness, and stone-ground feed. Zeus dreamt it for them, to provide sensations of continuity.

X-ray as Movie Screen by Keith Nathan Brown

A mime trapped in a box during rush-hour traffic: the cars have come to a halt. A swat team swoops in on rappelling cables from clouds. Inside the box is another box with a naked man who appears to be screaming, pounding his fist. A look of horror is on his face. The swat discover that the box is in fact a walk-in closet: an evolutionary dead-end with a door, in those backwaters, like the static cling of a foreign drama, are subtitles for bodies like a stream of fish: Do not feed on your body, exclaim the swat. Certain types of drama are infectious: the loneliness on barstools, multiplying. Other dramas are fatal: homicides in bedrooms, dividing. The wet salt makes a slick barrier and a host of us all. But Stomach Metropolis, a spotted B&W film, had somehow spread to the mime's liver and pancreas, each of whom prescribed a bottle of whiskey to dull the mime, wrapped in a brown paper bag. When the mime self-medicated he threw tomatoes at the spectators, who fled as would bystanders during a bloody coup, a political upheaval in an unstable region or country, a country of white blood cells voting to heave red and flowing out his mouth, forces the mime to take a bow. The mime takes a bow. The mime pulls up and buckles his invisible pants and again thanks the crowd for attending. He tows the box inside the box away. Burns or buries all the clothes hanging like animal skins in his closet. The body, which was no longer his own, which he had come to love and respect with all its flaws, now promptly slips into a scalding hot bath.

The bathroom mirror is steamed over.

Dead Communists by Arijit Sen

Engels places third in a Karl Marx look-alike contest. Depressed, he repairs to the attic to sulk in solitude, and demonstrates his anger by bouncing cats violently against the exposed brick of the east wall.

He writes a Letter to the Editor establishing Marx as charlatan and cheat; a pox upon the good name of collaborations, and—what is worst—a man concerned with his public image.

When Marx arrives to tender his apologies, Engels pretends to be immersed in a close reading of the Bible, and waves away the man he tried so recently to emulate. Angered, Marx steals his cat.

Then, Marx steals his essence. Karl becomes known as a be-header of champagne bottles. At parties he guffaws, recites anecdotes, is reportedly working on a ventriloquism act using Engels' cat as a dummy.

Alone in the attic, Engels grows morose and depressed. To cheer him up, his parents take him to eat ice-cream. His father suggests a game of Cossacks and Robbers. Engels can be the Cossack.

Engels refuses—he is interested in pursuits more intellectual and solitary. His cat was always the Cossack. He wants justice. He yearns for truth.

There's nothing to do, his parents say. Karl is taller, fair-headed. He is sweet to old men, and charming with the ladies. Engels—little Friedrich—is known for his jollity and mercurial temperament.

I am known for my cat, solemn Engels replies.

A Parental Council is convened, the two titans brought in. Reparations must be made—Marx returns the cat, and Engels his hand in friendship. The parents all cheer. A celebratory photograph is commissioned to celebrate the re-seeding of fraternity.

Yet Marx and Engels will never be friends, not truly. They know this, and gaze apart from one another. They are sullen and sulky. The picture is for show, a sham, true history for the masses.