

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

[words by Joseph Goosey, Michael Ray Laemmle, Caroline Wright, David Mac, Richard Rippon,
Henry Littlefields, Rodrigo V. Dela Peña Jr., Jody Brooks, & Corey Mesler]

Giant Ginger Snap Cookies by Joseph Goosey

There was something very transparent about it which I could not seem to hurdle. Sometimes water runs through eyelids and you simply cannot bring yourself to think of her smoothly powdered bottom on someone Else's couch. She enjoys the giant ginger snap cookies at the organic food mart and one day, silly me, I will drive the 26 miles, go up to the counter and say, "Excuse me, But I would like to have one of those giant ginger snap cookies." and the young girl/boy behind the counter (who will be wearing a green/blue bandanna) will wrap the giant ginger snap cookie up in one of those napkin things much like the stuff at the doctors office you sit down on once you have taken off all of your outdated clothing. I will make the 26 mile return trip, walk through tan doorways and she will be sitting in something like a chair talking about the famous folks from the forties and fifties. She will see the cookie in my hand and thank me kindly. But I do not really expect any of this to grow. Often times, many times, people will meet like that, I mean, in rooms on the other side of tan doorways. It happens and so do other, worse things, they happen too and there is nothing one can jump in front of or place in the road. One can write 29 pages about the time in the restaurant, or 10 pages about the time in the attic but when the time switches over and you find yourself ready for your pajamas at 3:34PM Santa Clara is still a long ways away.

Pardon My Psychoanalysis by Michael Ray Laemmle

Did you just ask if I've ever had a black, tarry bowel movement?

Yes.

Ask again, please. Slowly.

A black, tarry bowel movement? Have you ever discharged one?

From my anus?

Yes, I suppose.

I don't understand why that's any of your business.

I know it's an embarrassing question. I hate having to ask it, but it's company policy. I don't put these psychological assessments together. But I'm sure the reasoning behind them is sound. The results of this test will either qualify or disqualify you for employment. You can't pass on any of the questions.

But this is K-Mart.

K-Mart wants to know.

The job pays six bucks an hour.

Yeah?

Seems crazy to make me jump through hoops, just for a lame job making crappy money.

It's a job, isn't it?

Sort of. Listen, I get the question about whether I'd report a family member who'd stolen something. That makes sense. I suppose if I said an unqualified YES, K-Mart would think I'm full of it, and I'd be disqualified for trying to answer to the test. The more natural answer is NO, because most people wouldn't, except for freaks who have no soul and trust in the absolute wisdom of authority. K-Mart probably realizes that people who answer NO are being truthful. Therefore they can take the results of the test seriously.

Doubtless.

But there's a problem with both answers.

How so?

Well, a question like that must be one of the keys to interpreting the test. If a person says YES, he's probably full of shit. But he may still be full of shit if he says NO, because he could still be playing to the test, if he assumes an honest answer will be considered more favorably by K-Mart.

Sure.

But K-Mart's psychologists have to know this. They know that either way the interviewee answers, he's screwed. So what does the question mean? What operation does it have for the test? It's obviously not for mere shits and giggles.

Nothing K-Mart does is for shits and giggles, I imagine.

Of course not.

So what's your point?

My point is, what exactly is K-Mart getting at with the question about my bowel movements?

I'm not sure. Maybe because it's very personal, and they figure if you answer YES, it shows you're willing to bare all your shame for the company. Shows loyalty, that you care what corporate thinks.

What if I say NO, but I'm lying? How would they know?

Well, there is a string of questions concerning bowel movements. If you say NO, I'm supposed to skip the next five questions. If you say YES, I'm supposed to ask them.

Okay, I'll bite. And honestly, yes, I have had a black, tarry bowel movement.

How black?

Boy, that's tough. I've had some very dark, dark brown bowel movements. Would I classify them as black? As literally devoid of color? I think not. However, they were very dark.

Darker than dark chocolate?

Yes.

By quite a bit?

By just a smidgen.

Darker than coffee?

With creamer?

Without.

Then I'd say yes, I've had bowel movements, on occasion, as dark as coffee without creamer.

On a scale of 1-5, how black would you rate them?

Just one of the bowel movements, or all of them averaged out?

I suppose the blackest one you've had.

Can I use fractions or decimals?

Whole numbers only.

Then definitely a 4. But if the scale were 1-10, I'd probably go with 7.

Not 9?

Hmmm. Actually, I better go with 8.

But $8/10$ is the same as $4/5$.

True. Then I'll go with 8.5.

Okay. But it's irrelevant anyway. The scale is 1-5.

You know what I think?

Hmm?

I think they're asking this for insurance purposes. You know, like, what is the probability I have intestinal cancer.

Could be. Then again, we're not offering you health insurance. Not until you've worked here three years.

Three years? Jeez, what a demonic fucking company. Are they just trying to weed out all those white-collar professionals who only apply to K-Mart for the mind-staggering benefits?

I suppose.

And why would they want to know whether I have intestinal cancer already, before I'm hired? Is that a risk of working here? Like, if one day in the future I claim I got intestinal cancer from working at K-Mart, they'll drudge this test up and say, Sorry, but it looks like you had intestinal cancer prior to your employment.

I'm not sure.

Do you have intestinal cancer?

Not that I know of.

Ever had a black, tarry bowel movement?

None of your business.

And my bowels are your business?

I've been hired. You're looking for work.

Next question.

If a coworker asked you to take an extra five minutes for break, would you?

No.

Would you report the coworker to the appropriate manager?

Hell no. You know, these tests aren't even legitimate. I was reading an article about psychological profiles in Scientific American....

Were you?

Yeah, I was. You think I'm stupid because I want to work at K-Mart? You think I don't have any intellectual pursuits? Any dreams besides stocking K-Mart's glorious aisles with consumer merchandise?

I didn't mean to suggest that.

I'm going to college, man. And this is a college town. There's too much competition for the good jobs.

K-Mart isn't bad.

Whatever. So the article was saying that nobody knows how to test for behavior. The writer was specifically talking about heroism in wartime. The military can't develop a test to determine who'd be the perfect soldier. Nobody knows how somebody will act under the pressure of combat. Military history is filled with valorous people who nobody would have taken for a hero.

What are you saying?

I'm saying K-Mart's executives should shove this test right up their big, fat asses, next time they get a chance. Next question.

Have you ever had blood in your stool, or what you thought was blood in your urine?

I'll take the dog.

No, no way, you're not having the dog, no you can't, it's mine.

The dog's not yours, it's mine.

You can have the snake or the rat.

I don't want the snake or the rat, they're yours.

You're not having the dog, anything else, not the dog.

The dog's bloody well mine and you know it.

Stop swearing.

I'll swear if I want, the dog's mine.

We can share then.

What, I take from the mid-rift up, don't be bloody daft.

Stop swearing.

Predictable, every time we argue, you tell me to stop swearing.

Yes, that's because you swear, predictably.

I'm not sharing the dog, it's mine.

We can take turns then: a joint ownership kind of thing.

I'm not sharing and that's that.

Stop swearing.

I didn't swear.

Yes you did.

The dog's mine.

Okay, let's compromise, you have the dog.

Fine.

Not its not, it's not a compromise.

Stop playing games.

I'm not.

Yes you are. Where's the bloody waiter anyway.

Christ, I could murder fish and chips.

Stop swearing.

Cobain Comes by David Mac

Cobain comes and sits on my window ledge. He seems to like that, and uses it as his favorite perch. Sometimes I wait for him. He comes just before dawn. I leave crumbs and seeds out for him.

When he comes today I lean out of my window and look up at the starry sky at nothing in particular. I have some feed in my palm for him to peck at.

Maybe I will stroke him under his stubble chin. Maybe I will groom his blonde hair and look into those blue, troubled eyes.

I will ask him, as I do each time, 'Why?'

'Don't,' he will say.

He doesn't ever explain.

But I love him so much.

How was the little greenhouse? Your last place when no one knew where you were. Were you hiding? Do you recall? Did you choose twenty-seven?

Was it a master plan?

I read that Courtney took a bit of your skull.

You looked good together. You were both beautiful but on fire.

Now you're over and immortal, forever.

I tell him I liked his sunglasses and red-and-black striped top. I liked the rip at the knee of his jeans. I liked the cardigans and retro look. How many layers did he wear to make himself look bigger?

He taught me how to frown. He made me scrawl lyrics into my wall. That day I found out and fell sad and black for days. I was almost sixteen when he blew his head open.

And they tried to say that it was some murder, and that he was too doped up to hold a shotgun and put it to his pretty head and pull the trigger. They said Courtney did it.

Courtney is strong and tough. I admire her. I always fancied her bass player too.

'Don't tell no one.'

I liked the way you turned that guitar into a chainsaw. Did it remind you of your timber community? Where was it? Washington? Aberdeen? Some place I've never been.

One day.

I liked the way you screamed and hissed. Face covered by straw hair, chin stuck out. I liked the way you smashed the guitar and snapped its neck, ran at the drums, pushed amps down. I liked the way you hung on Kris's back or jumped into the crowd.

But now it turns dawn and he sits upon my floor as I write this. It is dawn and he draws pictures of pink babies in the womb. I ask him, 'Hey, Kurt, why can't you draw something happy, man?'

'Uh, yeah, okay, sure...' he says. 'Let me finish this, yeah?'
He doesn't give me a smile. He keeps it for himself.
I fall asleep and he goes. I awake and he is gone.
That Pisces, Jesus Man.
He will sign eternally.

The End by Richard Rippon

When the world ended, it wasn't a pretty sight. Nor did it go immediately. The bugger took six days. About the same amount of time it took to knock up, some would have it.

Day One

Nothing much happened on day one that would have indicated that it was the beginning of the end, but cats appeared nervous and dogs looked up. Scientists who were involved with such things observed that many of their instruments which measured global electromagnetic fields, had started to obtain some extremely worrying readings. Had an accurate 'End of the World' sign been available, it would have been flashing on amber at the very least.

Day Two

The news broke and the world was in disbelief. World leaders addressed their respective nations, requesting for calm. Religious leaders addressed their flocks and told everyone that they had told them so. So did the environmentalists. Most people continued to go about their daily existence, as it gradually became clear and real that things were not looking good. Internet bloggers took the time to write their feelings on the forthcoming denouement. Then they realized that there was going to be nobody around to read them. Then they wrote their feelings about that.

Day Three

If there was a point in reporting it, this would have been known as 'Crazy Day' as that's how everyone went. Day three was all about wish fulfillment, with many people desperately trying to fill their last hours with activities important to them. The streets were filled with people having sex in orgiastic clusters, in threes, in pairs, and even singularly. Looting was prevalent, but most shop owners simply opened their doors. People ate constantly and badly. Many drank, drugged or fucked themselves to death. Many people committed suicide, but many more decided to hang on to see what was going to happen. There was lots of murdering, with many eager to see off long term grudges before fate did it for them. Ironically, those already diagnosed with mental illnesses such as dementia or acute psychosis met the day with quiet reflection.

Day Four

Extremely strange things happened on this day which very nearly distracted the people of the world from all their fucking and killing. Flying birds fell from the sky. Previously flightless birds such as penguins and emu suddenly found the ability to fly. A weird kind of global temporal disruption occurred, which meant, amongst other things, that dinosaurs briefly reappeared. The humans ran in terror, though the dinosaurs were so confused at being back on the planet that they merely sat and looked around. In the evening, John and George appeared from the same temporal fissure and The Beatles briefly reformed. Unfortunately this went largely unheralded due to the fact that sound had decided to jump ship from the planet prematurely. People tended to communicate by way of shrugs from then on.

Day Five

This was the day with most of the fireworks. The seas rose and tidal waves crashed down onto cities. Earthquakes tore the earth apart. Volcanoes erupted, sending ash and magma skyward. Crazy lightening lit the otherwise bleak sky. It rained purple, which was not nearly as cool as the 1984 track by Prince would have us believe. Many people screamed (silently). Many people died. The full CGI bit.

Day Six

When it came to it, the world started folding in on itself, much like the house at the end of Poltergeist. Millions of tons of matter collapsed into a mass of ever increasing density and ever decreasing volume. Finally, it disappeared up the arse of a single Costa Rican Howler monkey who died almost instantly and then proceeded to float around aimlessly in space. It eventually became a part of the Mars-Jupiter asteroid belt, where it was picked up millennia later by a craft full of beings who were all about exploration. One of them took it home as a trophy where it sat on a kind of plinth and was observed fondly as a mascot. This was mainly due to the cheeky winking face on it, which was nothing to do with cheekiness, but rather more to do with a wincing gesture following the insertion of the planet. That was more or less it.

An Ice Cream Parlor by Henry Littlefields

There is a fish tank in the back of my store. I don't own this store yet and I don't think the fish tank is there yet either, but I will put a tank in there one day when I own the store. The store is just a small ice cream shop in San Francisco. It's called "Everyday Ice Cream." It is where I am going to retire. If you, whoever you are, ever make it there you can be my number two employee (the number one employee spot is reserved for someone special in my heart). I will give you the job without an interview and you will not have to bring in a resume. I do not believe in resumes. I will try to get through the rest of life without ever updating my resume again. Instead, I believe in lists:

1. Get out of bed.
2. Wear a shirt.
3. Make breakfast and drink a glass of milk.
4. Wear pants.
5. Make sure my shoelaces are tied.
6. Go grocery shopping.
7. Steal quarters from the charity cup at the counter.
8. Do laundry
9. Buy the ice cream shop.

It is my plan, if I ever have to apply for a job again, to send in one of my lists to prove to them that I have the qualifications they are looking for. Maybe I will send in this list:

1. Go to Minnesota.
2. Find the Mississippi river.
3. Build a raft.
4. Make friends with a guy name Jim.
5. Go floating down the Mississippi with Jim.
6. Rewrite the greatest book in American Literature when I reach the Gulf of Mexico.

Now, I know there is very little chance that I'll be able to reproduce the greatest book in American writings, but my potential employers don't know that so why not wow them a little.

The only thing I ask of you when you become the number two employee is that you make sure to clean out that damn fish tank when you get there. That will be your only responsibility. The rest of the time we can just sit and think of literary names for the flavors of ice cream. I'm not talking about stupid names like

Bukowski's Rum Raisin or Vonnegut's Galactic Cookies 'n Cream. No, I was thinking we could name them after famous unpublished novels: The Original of Laura (Nabokov), And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks (Burroughs and Kerouac), Prince Jellyfish (Hunter S. Thompson), The God of the Martians (Brautigan)...

The ice cream shop is a long way off though.

When I woke up this morning there was a refrigerator tipped over in my doorway. I wish it meant the city was self destructing and fridges were freefalling from the sky, but I'm afraid it was just a case of your average hooligan tossing an old fridge square where they thought it would look pretty. I have to admit, I would have left my new icebox friend blocking the doorway for the rest of my days if I never had to leave the house again, but I had to tasks and so the song of farewell was a familiar tune in the dawn of the morning.

Off I go. What a nice stride, so fluid and galloptuous. And that pace, it must be near world record speed. Oh, I'm on the top of the hill now. Wave goodbye. Shout it out, "Goodbye Herry Littlefields" And I'm gone. That's the last you'll see of that guy. Yep, see you guys somewhere else.

A few miles later I stepped on a twig as I walked to work.

And not too long after that there was a pavement field with at least twenty dead French soldiers, their souls hovering in the cold morning over their remains, left wondering if they'd ever see the inside of a McDonalds fry basket again.

The morning kept giving. There was the homeless man gathering soda cans in hopes that today would be the day aluminum became a scarce metal. For a second I wondered if the man would give me his business model for five dollars, but thought it might be a better career move to just steal the cart from him. And the second stood frozen in time as my head added up all the possibilities that'd open up if I never had to work again.

A couple minutes into the future I was back on my way, free from the time-lock sinkhole a few hundred feet into the past. And in this future there were two guys in the midst of a childish effort to dig to China. They had some big tools so their attempt wasn't as laughable as their plan. Unfortunately, they were both public works employees and amid their adventures had come across a leaky pipe. Citing the public works code of conduct they gave up on their dreams and began the menial task of keeping the city running.

I stood over the hole for a while watching the men work. Finally, one looked up. He might have been crying. That's what I imagined I saw, but I didn't hang around long enough to get a good look. I just took off screaming.

I would outrun responsibility, shedding the duties the world snuck onto my lists. As I ran I composed new lists:

1. Be the president of a Shaolin dojo.
2. Get an Argentina fishing pole
3. Eat an earthquake.
4. Smell like muffins on Wednesdays.
5. Keep a marching band in my pocket
6. Go to Kentucky and put all my money on a horse named 'glue factory'.
7. Pretend to be a statue for one year of my life.
8. Find a wizard who can make lead into gold and kill any who say it can't be done.

The universe outwitted me though because when I couldn't run anymore I happened to be out front of my work. And laughs thundered as I went inside.

Algebra by Rodrigo V. Dela Peña Jr.

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Solve for x , the teacher's tired calligraphy announced on the blackboard.

That day, a freshman had leaped from the top of the Humanities building, fracturing her skull.

It was the year when we were beginning to understand the intricacies of the body—the four-chambered heart, liver that purified the corpuscles of the blood, a skeleton almost comical displayed in the lab.

Someone said the girl died instantly, as though her pulse ceased the moment she hit the ground.

It was a mystery why she jumped, much like the unknown variable in algebra class was a riddle I could not decipher.

I took comfort in the body's rhythms explained, the frog dissected then preserved in formalin.

But on my half-sheet of pad paper neatly torn cross-wise with surgical precision, the equations never took off in their intended trajectory.

We shuffled along the hallways that dimly echoed with secrets whispered, reluctant of contact, uncertain of the future looming before us.

A white van arrived to stitch together her broken body while our bones itched with desire, our voices quivering in the strange language of mathematics.

We edged into daylight, painfully conscious of gravity, puzzled by integers in their disguises of x and y we will incessantly be solving.

A Local Baseball Story by Jody Brooks

The soot and the rumble weren't supposed to be part of the game. Neither were the holes or the weeds or the deflated punching bag they used for second.

Here are the other things they had to deal with: the railroad tracks on the edge of the outfield, close enough to feel the breeze as the train went by; the potholes in deep center which everyone aimed for.

When the train came, as it did every afternoon, the soot and the squeal and the shake reminded them that they weren't in Wrigley, that they were in Clyde and their mothers were up the street, their fathers in the mines below.

Every morning, the coal slid down into the open cars, echoing like a giant steel drum. Piled up like that, the coal looked light as truffles.

During the week, their mothers teased hair, piled high and starched. Their fathers were white teeth and grime-etched wrinkles. Mothers wore pearl earrings and polka dots. On weekends, they talked while they waited for their bowling balls to roll under the floor, back to them. Fathers downed PBRs and sunk 8-balls. They spoke of pits and quarries while their sons and daughters met at the top of the bleachers to look at National Geographic and to look at the stars.

The sons and daughters wanted to fly carrier planes; they wanted to build towers. And on Saturdays, they wanted to played ball.

Chris was up to bat when they heard the train. He swung, dropped his shoulder only slightly, and the ball went. It went over Michael's head, over the deflated punching bag, over Tina who was running back, back until the threat of potholes stopped her short. The ball flew. It didn't start its downward arc until it was free of the field, headed toward a coal car where it landed, settled, a single white ball in the middle of the dark.

An Afternoon With Two Poets by Corey Mesler

--What for the afternoon have we?
--Dunno. A little food?
--Yeah, food's good. How about the new Sweet shop?
--Dessert for lunch?
--No, they have sandwiches. And the most ungodly French fries. French fries to curl your toes.
--I need curly toes.
--The afternoon spreads out before us like a patient—
--You know Eliot puts me off my food.
--Besides—lunch. Well, I guess we could call it lunch.
--A little late?
--Nah. I haven't had anything since morning coffee.
--During the buzz of which you composed.
--Right. As per usual.
--I wish I was a morning poet.
--I wish I was a night poet, a middle-of-the-night poet.
--Insomnia has its pluses.
--Right.
--But you get that morning thing going, starts the whole day off right.
--When it's working, when it's good.
--Yeah, there's that danger. Have a crappy morning, a morning of stubborn goo, and your whole day could turn that way.
--Thanks. Now I'm cursed for tomorrow.
--No, no, now. No such prefiguring is at work.
--Right.
--So, this new poem about Scarlett Johansson, it—rhymes.
--Scarlett Johansson, mm. She looks like she's made out of cake. Fairy cake.
--So you say in the poem. It—rhymes.
--Yeah, almost unintentionally. The first three lines rhymed and I thought, hm, maybe, just maybe.
--It doesn't scan though.
--Hm?
--It doesn't scan.
--It's contrapuntal.
--It's—it's not.
--Really? Whatever. Hey, I got this new Bad Plus cd.
--The live one?
--Yes. You've heard it?
--No.
--Oh, well, I can put something else on. Some—ah, Ayler.
--I don't care really. You're in jazz mode today?
--Don't have to be. Folk mode? Wanna hear Hamilton Camp?
--Jesus.
--What do—
--Listen, I thought we were gonna eat.
--Right, right. You meant now. Ok, yes, let's go eat.
--Hey—I didn't—you know, hit a wrong chord by suggesting—

--That I don't scan?
--Well, yeah. I mean, I didn't—
--It couldn't matter less.
--Good, good.
--You. What are you working on?
--Oh, you know, that suite for Kim. Still trying to get a form for it, a form that allows me to experiment and still stay tight, stay fixed.
--Fixed?
--No, that's not the word.
--Formal?
--Nah, no. Not formal.
--You want a pattern, a form. I dig.
--I guess. Well, you know. It's long. It's bigger than I'm comfortable with maybe, a chapbook length single poem.
--A suite.
--Yes.
--You can do it.
--Thanks for that.
--Is it the Kim thing got you worried? The dead tail that won't fall off.
--Maybe. Perhaps.
--Ever see her?
--No. Never. I got her email from someone who knew her back in the day. Got her email and composed a friendly note, asking, you know, for connection. Just that. Just say hi, maybe exchange life stories. Check in occasionally with each other.
--Maybe talk about getting naked together again.
--Mm. No.
--She didn't respond.
--You know this story.
--It's an old story.
--I don't understand. I mean, why not write back?
--Some don't. Some people don't.
--I guess.
--Kim was—well, a bit unbalanced maybe. Not unbalanced like moon-stricken. A bit—uncentered.
--Yes.
--But so goddamned beautiful it didn't matter.
--Ha. Exactly.
--So, ok, let's get some of those prodigious, unguinous French fries. I've got the car keys out. I am a man prepared.
--Yes.
--And we shall talk of many things.
--Ok.
--Of poems and women and dead tails and Bad Plus and morning writers vs. nighttime writers. And perhaps, just perhaps, we shall wring from the ether a little wonder, a little understanding about some small bit of the universe and how it works. An epiphany concerning some small task that the universe gets right, that it daily gets right. Is that too much to ask?
--I'm damned if I know.
--You're damned if you don't.
--Right.
--French fries.
--That'll right your listing ship.
--Wonderful.
--Whatever.
--Yes. Who's that in the red car?

--I—
--It's—
--Fuck me, it's Kim.
--And she's looking at us.
--She is. Kim.
--It's. Not her.
--It is. Kim.
--This is the poem. This is the poem writing itself. This is the gift the universe is giving us today, the poem,
the continuation of the poem.
--No. Not that.
--Yes!
--I am at a loss for words.
--You really are, aren't you?
--I am a loss of words, a tumble toward ataxia.
--You can tumble but the words will always return. It is in the nature of words that they return, like the
swallow to the hookers.
--Ha. Ok. I'm calmer now. She's driven away.
--Yes,
--It wasn't Kim, just some pilgrim, lost, turning her ancient car around.
--If you say so.
--Kim would—well, I am the last man to know what Kim would do.
--But you are not the last man.
--No, there will be other men, for Kim, for the world to turn inside out. Other poets who will be wordless
when the time arises for them to stand up and be counted.
--That sounds a bit like an Army recruitment ad.
--Sorry.
--No sorry, man. Tell me more about words, about poems aborning.
--No, not today. French fries today. Some days are just French fries and no poems. Some days are for both
French fries and poems but this is not one of those days.
--Ok.
--Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow we shall speak of the stubborn ox called The Poem.
--Right.
--Ok.
--Friend—
--Yes....
--The red car is coming back.
--I am ready now. I am ready to speak.