

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e T w e l v e

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Diana Kole, Jarrid Deaton, Sean Lovelace, Darby Larson, Tim Roberts, Nicelle Davis, & Robert Kloss]

The Oregon Trail is a Deceased Hippopotamus in Tepid Bathwater by Gregory Sherl

I am aroused by the hum of the modem.
My heart is a word processor. My heart
is a bloody fingertip, is a keystroke, a private
Facebook message saying There are days
when I'm aroused with being aroused.

There are days when we should only
be naked. Today it is March & snowing
in Independence. You have come down
with exhaustion. I hold your hair with
my teeth.

My computer eats your floppy disk lips.
My God is your God & he's fucking
mean, man.

I want to bleach your ribcage.
I want to swallow the Kansas River.

The oxen are tired. They demand
rest, reasons for futility, someone
to clean their horns.

My wagon is a carcass of remorse.

I ford the river alone.

Reading in the Lion's Den by Daniel Carter

He painted me, and his eyes fell clouded. The ocher burden on the left, tuft of its tail crushed against the gilt frame, was a blemish to threaten me. Nobody reads the dew before the lion's claws, the letters that bleed across the sand. Translate the darkness that makes ribs hard and hungry: prophets that promise There's no boy in the beast, no prince in the whispering furnace.

Escape is seeing the light pour down the mouth of the well. Escape is seeing the inside of the beast. He painted me—a bundle of rags held up by yellow—but my body is wrapped in string and dropped into the darkest pit. I read his drippings flung down and holy; they read my bones spit out as history. A curl made black and heavy, I nest in him and learn how the riddle ends. What comes from his mouth is feathers and fluff.

What comes from his mouth is not a clue. My script has run out. Wet and dripping, living marks fall dead on the sand, silent and indecipherable as the roar of the beast. He painted me out of mystery, gave me a dais of light, but he forgot that my body is shaken and torn. What comes from his mouth is new and wet and formed, all my pieces made up again. I wait for his drippings to come down holy, repeat the riddle. Wait for light to pour from his mouth.

Never Forgive You by Jack Martin

I forgive you. Coming home is
a basket of apples. Oversleep
won't replace clean water.
What else exists to hold me here?
Lawyers for the survivors say,
Nothing. I forgive you. The bird's reflection
drops from the pane of glass
as the bird drops from the pane of glass.
Sometimes things seem clear.
Look into my eyes. What else? Everything
equal and opposite has a reaction.
Forgiveness is unfair. White-sugared bulb
in cold storage, tap root, adipose
memory, book. My lord
is a shepherd of crooks and want.
Increased drone activity will not
find anything I want to know.
I want to know.

Nothing, Anybody by Parker Tettleton

I'm sick as a normal person
a zit on the lip of the moon
that is really the sun it's just late
that is really your face
it's just that easy to fuck up
the most beautiful things
your smile and crying
the heat dying where you left it
left me too much bed
I lie a lot to myself
and sometimes to others
I love you more now
that where I can't sleep is clean
and what I drink means nothing to anybody

The Girl Next Door by George Moore

has gone to Amsterdam
and found the darkness
in her heart. She wears

too much mascara, her innocence
besmudged, or bemused. She
smokes in bars and then

smokes in bars. And next door
her mother sends her father out for the news
and curls with her Soaps

while all Europe bleeds from the mouth
when she cannot find her remote
and crawls into her daughter's womb.

The Girl Made of Mud by N. God Savage

Before the girl existed there was only dirt. It was black and peaty, caking the wooden spokes of wagons that rolled through the streets. It was the kind of dirt you would kick across a path or brush from your shoulder after scraping against a wet autumn branch. It was lifeless dirt, soulless clumps of pointless filth.

When she was conceived she was nothing but matter. She was proliferating carbon, growing and spreading like turbid floodwater. Upon birth she had dried into clay, compacted and shaped into the form of a child. Scooped from the earth and given structure, then fired in a womb to make this structure stick. When she was born she was mud, but she was mud that felt: seeing, hearing, hurting.

The girl made of mud acquired a reputation in the town. Her skin was not lush and pink; her hair neither soft nor fragrant. Her friends' mothers hurriedly rushed to wipe down chairs upon which she had sat. The girl gazed at her drab skin and tatter-leaf hair in silence, the perfect silver of the mirror's surface an insult. She developed into a ball of frost-covered pain, loam alienated from a winter landscape. Carved from the earth and surrounded by sky, she was agoraphobic mud, yearning for the steady warmth of the burial ground. Her body was an archeological dig, suffused with relics of her anxiety. Terror curled up the lifeless root of her spine and coiled around the flint of her bones. Icy panic trickled from the base of a cold, stone skull and overflowed sackcloth lungs.

She was taken to a laboratory for testing, to determine how lifeless mud could suffer so. For years they worked, scraping away gritty samples of her for analysis. Eventually they concluded it was a mystery, and invented grand concepts to capture this miraculous fact – that dead dirt, taken from the earth, could feel. They called this sensitivity an "emergent phenomenon – a high-level functional property of soil." Her ears were deaf to this dry science. Instead she prayed for the feelings to fade. She yearned to be regular mud again, qualia-free, seeping into the earth from which she was formed.

When she died they made her into a roadblock, a trundling slab of wood in which she was entombed. They hoisted her onto a wagon which paraded, with mock reverence, through the town. She inconvenienced many people that day – people who were late to work, who missed appointments, who idled, frustrated, behind the long chain of traffic that followed her coffin. Her burial was a unification of inanimate mud. Clay became formless, crumbling and dull – the feelings fading, the panic dispersed. She dissolved into the fields and lanes of her country like spilt oil. She was a girl made of mud, made mud once more, and her disintegrating pores wept consoling sediment as she went back.

The Bright Shine of Gong by Howie Good

And who are you to compare my heart to a Falling Rock
Zone? Except for the red sweater, I look my age. Only the
injured survivors can discuss the hypothetical as if it
were real. On the empty porch of the shuttered house, I
catch a whiff of what might be the sea. Crows fill the
world with the same noise as a dying bomb. I step down off
the porch – an implied promise to carry a light just in

case.

Two Ways to Become Lost by Diana Kole

We are going into exile, he tells her. We will have yellow helmets and eat rice without cooking it, crunching the grains, and our teeth will grow stronger. I'll look at you across the dead apartment where we'll hide and you'll look at me, and I'll understand some of your accusations. It will be summer, though, where we'll go, and there will be piers for us to find, open places to lie down in. We won't have to make anything at all.

She sits, sewing. The thread is attached to the hem of his heavy coat and she is sewing coins into its lining. She sews them heavier. He is pinned.

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Put up a smoke signal, he says, or we'll be stuck here.

What do you think I want? she says.

The island is not an island because it is connected to land. They cannot leave, there are tall electric fences, the ground sometimes shivers tightly. They call and order food to be delivered. The man arrives on a bicycle and they forget to see how he comes through the fence. They pay him and eat from the plastic containers, not disguising the noises of their mouths and tongues.

When a Bastard Stares at the Sun by Jarrid Deaton

The sun is going to slice your goddamn face open. It's going to split it right down the middle. You are sick. This is a sick morning for you. The window is there, naked, the curtain ripped down and thrown in the corner. You did that last night. The curtain reminded you of the last dress she wore, walking away with you pleading one step behind her shadow on the sidewalk. Now there's nothing to keep you hidden from the coming daylight. You now have a new set of hours to contend with, even if you stare right at the sky-blaze and remain motionless in bed. Pretend, then. Keep your eyes open through the pain and imagine it was a bomb, imagine a mushroom cloud in the distance. Imagine her shadow burned forever on the sidewalk, her ashes just out of reach.

Whenever it Rains by Sean Lovelace

Nothing.

Condensation pimpling the skin of grenade.

Muffle.

Nothing. Then:

Tuesday on the floor. (I have the last brass mail slot in the world.) On the front of the postcard was an image of a man with umbrella walking under scaffolding. It read: "You descend, they follow. I suppose it's a parlor game. I don't say herding if I lead, but let's not. There was a man known for biting diamonds. They had a book could decipher the odors in any dream. Also an ape we fed, until one day we looked closer and the ape was a potted tree with limbs of holiday lights. YOU MAY ONLY ATTEND THE FAIR ON MONDAYS, TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS, FRIDAYS, AND WEEKENDS. I just had an urge to gusto laugh, but I don't love you (not really) so will instead strike a ball with a mallet, though I have no mallet or ball. I will make the motion, in the air. Last night I entered the beige tent and slept with _____. And then _____. And then _____. Three times, before I even tasted glue. At the gift shop's gift shop. Downstairs, on the roof. 'How are things?' 'Things are fine.' And the safe will yawn open. Grab the jewels (kind of the point of opening the safe, yes?). Fine, I feel fine. Fine, I feel fine. Fine, I feel...WEDNESDAYS WE WOULD PREFER YOU SLEEP

PROFOUNDLY. This one morning I startle up pecking like a Cornish hen and this big funk-cloud of mildewed grain, and you know why? I am a Cornish hen.”

[i took this postcard and ground it into sand-like dots and filled an hour glass with words]

Ice Fence by Darby Larson

Maybe I wrote, 'this wolf surrounded by your linen.' I ordered a llama. Maybe we gathered outside by the ice fence. Once more before surrounding this wolf with linen. Then I wrote, 'seven' on your neck and 'you broke.'

The ice fence. I remember it most. Fire hoops and ears of wolf pups. Plus the dancing and the vultures and the mice.

Ice fence aside, 'you broke,' I wrote, beyond repair. Your dangling bones. Your father in the room covered and crying. And the wolves and the vultures and the mice kept dancing. And your father fell asleep around the time the llama arrived.

Field Test by Tim Roberts

I enter the field I always wanted to enter the field, this morning I wanted to do it. I did. If now and always you are tracking the entry in why don't you just go in? Can you make it? Do you need to use lowercase letters? Is there a ball of wax in there? How do you know what you want to do you hold out hope for the field do you come back to it day after day you only need to get going to get in there it will then take care of itself or you might simply talk about how it feels to be a man at all as opposed to a woman. Do you have any idea how it feels then memories begin coming in and then you see what happens the memory now ah well there it is the memory now it might do some good. That's an idea in the field what would actually do some good, if it happened, not the idea that no matter who it is we're all figuring things out and no matter who it is each time any sort of arousal happens it's always different, sex is always different, they need a thousand words for it, they do, can you manage it again or mustn't it be something entirely different now, I think it must, like writing every day.

I don't do anything the same every day unless it's deny physical exertion in a certain way though certainly the muscles in my hands would never say that. Now the thought turns ever so slightly I have a fork in the road I don't know what to do I think about staying with the daily idea I think about "the bullshit" I think about going on with the idea of the field I know I can't be this conscious does it feel any more immediate or do I want a new topic is now the time

that the field begins to surface that the place where anything said is said and it goes on for many years until

I'm someone completely different having written day after day and pushed and pushed until there's the field again, looking over me, it was so useful.

I love time, how it's simply not there, I love cute humor, I love abstraction, I love interiority which might be masking laziness or just lack. My friend my friend I think I knew what to do back then, such a time far back then, even then I was doing something to everyone that both engraved us all in us all but even now is nothing so much terribly but spew against the void. There I think a period makes sense there it does thanks it's sitting rather perfectly or who am I fooling I've forgotten it, imaginary thing it was before I made it appear.

I imagine if I keep going like this there will be some substance showing up, and that will be my field, like it or not, not many people there I think but that's a sure bet that it's good that it's going to be a way to critique the state of affairs, I want to be very careful with what I'm calling things, they need to make sense, this is an important world we have on our hands. I might fade from it, that could be what boredom is. Or perhaps it's the reverse of what the thinness is

the exactitude, yes what it means to move your gaze toward, without saying a single thing. Each day a little more turbulent. Each day a little more in my possession. I want to go back to philosophy even now since I have this pocket of everyday American life and you can see it's like it is and you can see if you're saying so much.

I gave, I gave over, I get up and run. The greetings come over the internet and than break up and explode like or explode and break up like things might have always been trying to. I am starting from the assumption that I will not be thinking but that I have been trying to think. There are interventions small but pronounced. Think so. Think so too?

By the Bible's Map, We have Lost the Location of Love by Nicelle Davis

Your hands trace the bars of my cage—
the two halves of ribs suggesting that I
hinge open where your fingers travel
in the direction of a changed lexicon—
stopping at my sternum. Our biblical
use of the word kidney has moved from
behind floating arches to the bone cased
heart. What read as pissing now pumps.
Love no longer has the satisfaction of
emptying—but is a cold fire circulating.

An Ancient House by Robert Kloss

Steve thought: A given alligator is a billion billion years old. Time has distilled within it the rudiments of every death. Steve thought: When you left me you didn't know I could hunt. Steve thought: You believed I had no teeth but I have many teeth. Steve thought: While I slept you emptied my life into strange animals. I know because my food is gone and starving cats yowl from my stoop. I sense traces of your fingertips on their black lips. Steve thought: You thought you could starve me into working. You thought you could make me move into a shopping mall or marry you inside a grocery store. Steve thought: You always said you looked prettiest under florescent lights. Pale and humming and lit from the inside. Steve thought: You said we should create animals together. You said 'what is my belly for but growing new animals?' Steve thought: You were always constructing shelves and beds. You were always painting rooms. You invented names. Steve thought: A given alligator is a billion billion years old. Steve thought: I see its yellow eyes instead of your eyes in the grocery store parking lot. I see its billion year old face instead of your face. Steve thought: You overestimated my need for new animals. We have many living creatures at our finger tips. Much ancient life darts through a wilderness. Steve thought: You talked about building a house from shopping malls and grocery stores. You needed bricks and wires and florescent lights to shelter the animals growing inside. I heard them mewling and squeaking through your membrane. Steve thought: An alligator must murder the membrane it is born into. Steve thought: I am not building your house. I am building a house of humid meat. Steve thought: I am building a house that devours a rotten kill. A house of claws and armored hide and milk teeth. Steve thought: I gathered materials from American sewers and Roman aqueducts with bolt guns and wire nets. I fastened tails and legs and skulls with rope and barbed wire. Steve thought: I built a house of humidity. I built a house older than your oldest countries.