

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

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Thank You by Alex Adams

You're better than me. Fierce and irrepressible, you exist. Your superiority radiates out of you like heat. It encloses me in light. You sealed me underwater and I bless the fluid filling my lungs. The less I breathe the more I love you.

You're my saviour. I'm invertebrate when I'm in your arms. I'm a creature, a serpent squirming to the gigantic music of your breathing. I cannot speak. I cannot touch. I cannot move. Thank you for tearing out my spine.

Your beauty breeds terror in the deep cavities of my chest. You are huge. You have power. I have no choice but to love you. I'm your slave, your property, your thing. I love your ability to crush me.

It feels good to be used by you. I'm not soiled. It's not contamination. You purify me with your hot breath. I am aflame, glorious, throbbing with servility. I obey you completely. I suck shit off your fingers, I swallow my tongue. You control the rhythm of my breath, the speed of my heart, the shape and texture of my body. With the tip of your mute tongue on my lips you command me. You choreograph the intricate, subtle motions of my fingers. You orchestrate the pulsing motion of my pelvis. Every inhalation of thick dark air is taken with your permission. I am pliable. Clay. I crawl for you.

Your cruelty is a sign of your love. Your violence defines me so I try to deserve it. My body begins where your fist stops. Your hands on my skin show me where I end. I am the flesh within your grasp. When you punish me I discover myself. When you're inside me, when you smother me, I know my name.

I am a part of your body. You fill me and I become you. The hot air in my lungs tastes of the filth in your acrid, stinking gut. The bitter spit on the sinewy slug of a tongue you force into my mouth tastes of your infinite voice. Each hammer-like blast of your thick, heavy heart forces dark salty blood through my weak, undeserving arteries. You are the smoke I breathe, your delicious sweat mixing with the tar spreading throughout my fibres.

When you empty yourself in me I glow. I hum with life. Your pleasure, your energy rests inside me, concentrated into a red orb of heat smouldering just below my stomach. You fall onto me in exhaustion and your suffocating weight warms me. You engulf me. The red swollen chamber of your womb surrounds me, numb and amniotic. I float in blissful, liquid, physical emotion. When you leave I feel hollow, as if miscarried. Without your body next to me, I cease to occupy space. At the moment of departure I become a vacuum: lifeless, inert, grey, boring meat.

I can taste you on my body. I am not alone. A thin film of your animal scent is always on my skin and I pray for you to renew its venereal potency. I pray for the next time the creature between your legs calls to me with its dark fleshy perfume. I pray for the next time you wrap your thick fingers around my ribs. I pray for you to force me, to distort me. I pray for you to choke the sounds out of my throat. I pray for you to animate my meaningless, pointless body. The thought of you grinding the pleasure out of my hips fills me with a

self-destructive lust. I long for your control. I long for your contempt. I long to see the victory in your eyes as you force me to orgasm again. I long for you to be saturated, swollen, bloated with desire, I long to disgust you and I long for you to fuck the ugliness out of me.

You know my thoughts. You can see deep into my contorted mind and I cannot hide. You know what I want: to be annihilated, consumed, blasted apart, atomised. I want to be ash, dust, blown into the street, exhaled, coughed up, metabolised. I want to be used, exhausted, spent, discarded and forgotten. I want you to dissolve me entirely in your pure, distilled hatred and shut me away in a hole of absolute gravity, on the other side of the world from your memory, so that I will never have existed.

A Piece of Scrap Paper by Charlie Geoghegan-Clements

When we were children we sat on top of piles of dirt in our Sunday clothes and mouthed tiny strategies under our parents' watchful eyes. On schoolyards we were an army of grass throwers that surrounded bullies and teachers. Junkyards were our armories, and the dirt pit held all our secrets.

When we were children we scribbled little plans on pieces of scrap paper. We built giant talking machines out of old newspapers and empty soda bottles to send to town to steal us candy. We planned to run away for months, and built a fortress in the woods in case the cowboys came.

When we were children we built the tiniest cities out of glass so we could break them and build all over. We dug tunnels behind the garden shed, trying to reach China. We filled them in, each evening before dinner. We wrote little symphonies to play on upturned trash bins and shoelace guitars that we forgot each night, just to start over.

The sun went down and we hid the pirate maps we'd drawn in invisible ink to crawl into beds, warm with the folding of mothers.

Today we hatch tactics that fall like dead mice from our mouths. Tired and scared, we scratch diagrams in the dust covering the floor. We've lost our maps. The cowboys have come. Folding paper cranes, we listen to the humming of street lights and recite to ourselves the songs we wrote when we were, once, children.

We were an army once, when we were children. We marched on ruined cities. We, with tomato soup tin can drums and reckless laughter, scared of one day becoming cowboys, built ourselves a prison out of ash and cardboard and without knowing it, closed the doors. We locked away all our love in a golden-green box to hide in the smallest places inside us, grown over with thorns.

We still whisper when we sleep, and that will be what gives us away in the end. We whisper to ourselves in the secret joy that suddenly, overnight, with a rainstorm, everything will change.

It is Just that Easy by Rebekah Cowell

In a fluorescent room, who is this, my parents?

Where am I - flat on my back?

A doctor, what did he say?

"Did you mean to kill yourself?"

Three days of blankness unnerving me, voices surrounding me.

The only voice I search for conspicuously not present.

I look my mother in the eyes.

"Where is he?"

I beg her, the woman I hadn't seen in months. His name trips off my tongue in every breath, yes I wanted to kill myself yes, now where is he?

He doesn't want to be a part of this, he's got a lawyer, she says.

Why didn't you fight to be by my side? Is this your easy way out of me?

Tears run down my wasted cheeks, across the bandage taped to my neck, an I.V. going to my heart – they say it was the last ditch effort.

I don't resist a sheet of paper is put under my hand a pen pressed into my trembling fingers - I sign myself in. Psychiatric Ward, I hear.

I blank in and out on the wheelchair ride from E.R. to that 4th floor.

A metal door clicks, opens, locks behind me.

In-take – weigh my scarecrow frame, take a haunting Polaroid so the staff can identify me, measure my bottomed out blood pressure, make my parents go, make them go, oh god, why are they here?

Vultures circling around the dead.

After midnight, led to a bed in a room of barred windows.

I cry myself to sleep.

We sit, me and the team of psychiatrists.

They probe. Ask, "On a scale of one-to-ten, where do your suicidal thoughts rate?"

As if we're doing a survey on favorite colors, favorite foods.

Death, they talk about it in the past tense, but it isn't my past, not yet, I'm suspended between the land of the living and the dark place brushing past my feet.

You're lucky, I hear. Lucky? Why?

I am lost between two worlds, I no longer wish to die, but do I want to live?

The I.V. finally goes, shower, I beg.

A nurse hands me a bar of soap, no shampoo here, a towel the size of a dish-cloth. A larger towel might tempt me to hang myself.

I observe the shower curtain bar - where do they think I'd get the energy to wrap a towel around my neck pass it back across the bar and wait to black out?

Warm water washes over and around me, I touch my body, yes, I am alive.

I force myself to stand naked before the mirror, bruises line my arms, up and down, every vein poked by needles desperate to find a vein; a lifeline.

I look at the wasting flesh – and I look myself in the eyes, a demand to find "me" in that space that goes beyond the cornea and retina; the eyes looking back at me haunting, black circles rimmed in eyelashes. Flashbacks - memory dragging me down a swirling whirlpool of pain – two bottles of pain pills, I choke on the chalky texture when the pills hit the back of my throat – lay down on my bed, turn over on my side, drop into everlasting nothingness.

For three days, they pumped me full of fluids, charcoal, drugs, my body floats around the peripheral edges of my mind.

I sit on the toilet seat and cry like a baby, a nurse raps on the door - barges in, she looks down at me, I see pity I don't like it.

"Go away!", I say defiantly.

"I'm giving you five minutes." She huffs off.

I put the sickly green hospital gown back on, my clothes cut from my body upon arrival. Nothing of me remains – I could be anyone, no one – my possessions, my identity – start over, I hear – like it is just that easy.

Today's Events by Kevin Sampsell

'Defense'

I'm at my son's lacrosse practice. It's on a big soccer field and the sun beats down. I'm watching from a distance, under a tree, in the shade. I didn't bring a lawn chair, so I sit uncomfortably on the grass. The kids are grouped into teams and my son plays in one scrimmage, about thirty yards to my right. They wear helmets but no pads. My son stands in the middle of the field as the other kids race around him trying to cradle the orange ball. His holds his stick high in the air, like he's waiting for a pass.

I call him over after the other team scores a goal. I tell him to get more involved, to chase after the ball, play defense.

He goes back and starts paying more attention. His defense is aggressive. He stick-checks a player for the other team and the ball bounces loose. The kid seems surprised, calls out to him, "This is just a friendly game!"

After the practice, I wait in the shade as my son gets a drink of water. There is a crow nearby, standing alone. I look at him and say out loud, "Crow." I stare at him for a while expecting something from him. I'm not sure what. Perhaps I want him to say, "Human."

'Slurpee'

We go to 7-11 to get a money order and an after-practice Slurpee. I start to pull into a parking spot, but there is a truck with its driver's door open. I wait for the person to notice but they're too busy doing something. I want to honk but instead I move my car slightly to the left, barely fitting into the space. I look over and see that the woman in the truck is leaning over and looking for something in the glove box of the truck. Her knees are on the driver's seat and she is wearing a short skirt. I can see almost her entire ass. It doesn't look like she is wearing any underwear. I can't tell how old she is. He could be sixteen or she could be forty.

There is a yellow and blue bruise just below her left ass cheek. I look in the backseat and see my son playing his Gameboy, oblivious to the woman. We go inside and I feed money into the money order machine. \$189.75. My son is helping himself at the Slurpee machine.

The woman comes into the store, walking with heavy steps. Her face looks haggard and she is wearing cheap-looking rings on her hands. Her face is much older than her body. I see her buy something in a box but I can't tell what it is. Cat food or cereal maybe.

When my son and I leave the store, I see the woman sitting in her truck. She's looking around nervously. We get in the car and my son holds the Slurpee to his head. I have to go back into the store to borrow a pen for my money order. I write out the info on my money order as the clerk watches me. When I go back outside, I see the woman yelling something and hitting her steering wheel.

'Dinner'

At home, I get ready to make dinner. I turn on the oven and spread frozen French fries onto a cooking sheet. When I open the oven door, I notice the smell of throw up. I wonder if someone threw up in the oven. I imagine what it would be like to throw up in the oven.

The air outside is cooling down as the sun lowers. It's still too hot though.

I spread the French fries so they're not touching, like the instructions say. I open the door to the oven. It makes a loud creaking noise. I throw up in the oven.

What Things One Finds in Pockets by Trace Sheridan

She finds a number in his pocket. She finds her number in his pocket quite honestly, because she does the wash. And before she washes, she empties the pockets, not just his, all the pockets: her fifteen year old's, her seven year old's, even her own. And why should she think anything of the number on a little scrap of paper or the name written by him in block letters, KATHERINE, catherine with a 'K'? Why should she think anything of the number or the name or the late nights working or the increasing trips away or his need to unwind down at Paul's Pub rather than with her? Why indeed.

He comes into the laundry room, she slides the number into her pocket. "Oh, hon," he says, taking the pants from her hands, "You don't have to wash those, let me do it."

The College Experience by Jamie Lin

Excitement beneath my twin breasts, summer exhaling, pausing, warmth like a mother's bloodstream over the Southern states, happy-to-help upperclassmen humming and hovering like bees, my new room barren, new possibilities, endless, endless, quite a beautiful moment between dreams and reality.

Crashing down hard, on the outside looking in, once again I find myself, too strange for the normal ones, not strange enough for the strange ones, on the brink between everything, once again, falling into old habits, never dying hard, falling, a dread at the bottom of my throat gathering like bile, I aim to spit it out, inhale cigarettes, wait for it to push me forward, pump excitement through me once again.

Realizing, thinking too much, the past integrating, once again like a bottle of spilled sour milk from the closet, running my fingers through my hair, pulling out loose strands, horrified, falling asleep at four, not waking up for first period class, finally unable to hide from the fundamental problems, finally march to the health center and ask for a session with a therapist, walked out with promise of an email with tears in my eyes, thinking of what to say.

Stuffing my fists into my mouth, feeling utterly alone and empty, stuck in my room, nowhere to go, not going to classes, not going to work, wanting to fuck, don't want to be fucked up further, restrain, more cigarette smoke, alcohol like water in the desert, dying for some distraction, no one to come with, too strange, too strange, hair falling all around the room, reading erotica late at night until it calms me and I drift into dreamless sleep.

Don't let it break you, don't let it break you, don't let those mood swings get the better of you, no situation is hopeless, changes, there can be changes, stop, stop, stop.

The first appointment is awkward, she stares as I cry into the sleeve of my black sweater, pathetic, the second is better, I open up more, I see beyond her perkiness that before repulsed me, she asked me what happened, I said I will write it down for her, all I do is write, there's nothing else.

Waiting for the third appointment now, wanting to fuck, fuck up, distract myself, there is no one around, treat yourself better, it is called respect, not many young people these days do, they get mad when you tell them to, don't make it worst, stop, stop, stop, pay attention to the good around you you dumb fuck.

Currently chewing gum furiously, listening to the temperature-controlling machine hum, debating moving to Boston to where my friend is, closer to home, run away, what is this place, nothing satisfies, want a whole different setting, this one doesn't work, want to lose myself in a different kind of perception, want to never feel alone again, I wanted so much to be senselessly in love with you, summer of dreams gone, I don't remember, reality has exhaled its nasty breath on me.

Sanctuary of the Elm by Janie Hofmann

The veterans' hospital stood under gigantic elms that decorated the usually blue horizon with swaying branches of rustling green. At the left corner of the hospital one of the larger elms hid a third story window. Sgt. Clem would stare out this window, pleading for his fingers.

"They were mine first," he cried at the tree.

"They ran away from you," the tree would answer in a soothing but condescending tone.

Clem would then try a different approach:

"You see, they were there for me. They got me into the lifeboat."

"But it was on fire," the tree argued.

"Only the bow," Clem said. "I put it out."

"So you went and burned your fingers off, after they had saved you. At least, that is what they told me," the tree said.

"No, nooo," Clem said. "This guy, a private, he tried to get in when I was putting out the fire. He was big, but I shoved him back and tore his ration pack off. When the strap of the rat pack broke, I fell backwards and my hands went into the fire."

"You don't take very good care of your things," the tree said.

Clem tried not to weep, lit the cigarette he held between his two good thumbs from a candle he always kept burning.

"Look, it's not just my fingers, it's my goddamn toes."

"Yes," the tree agreed. "They told me you didn't want them, either. The special doctor came all those miles, grafted your toes to your fingers, and you refused to use them."

"They were all wrong," Clem cried. "They were short, stubby and gnarled. And they didn't work."

"Your toes told me that all you cared about was not being able to feel the women up like you used to," the tree said flatly. "You hated them, just as you hated your fingers, so they came to me."

"It wasn't me," Clem argued. "My body rejected them."

"That's the same thing," the tree said.

"They just didn't feel like they were mine," Clem said.

"But now they do, now that they are gone?" the tree said.

"Yes."

"Well, I do have so many already," the tree said.

Clem brightened, lit another cigarette, though he still had the first one hanging from his mouth.

"I'll talk to them, try to get them to come see you for a little while," the tree said.

Clem was disappointed but did not wish to provoke.

"Thanks buddy," he said. "You're a real pal."

"Think nothing of it," the tree said.

Clem clumsily put out both cigarettes and got in bed. He slept and his dreams were vivid sequences of dancing orange and red flames.

At dawn he woke in a panic, soaked with sweat. From his bed he peered out the window at the tree.

He jumped out of bed and his left leg buckled, another left over from his having to push the private from the boat. He tried rubbing his thigh but it remained stubbornly rubbery and lax.

A golden ray of twilight entered the room and again he looked out the window. He began to shake as the leafy arms of the tree, bathed in misty dawn light, shook like dancing bejewelled arms.

"My god," he cried, grasping his leg.

"You're not leaving me, too?"

Same Name by Matthew Ward

My plan was to only screw women with the same name as my wife so there'd be no suspicion when I called out my mistress's name during sex.

Then one night during sex with my wife she called out my name and in my mind I naturally assumed that she was cheating.

Well, she kicked me out with only a pair of jeans, a watch and a brain that was so dumb I couldn't leave it to remedial science if I died.

Living on the streets wasn't easy. To reiterate, living on the roads was hard, too, but not as long.

The night and the day seemed as lonely as me. I decided to set them up on a date. But where to send them... Maybe a restaurant but it'd have to be really cozy... and really big.

I celebrated my new role as matchmaker by eating dessert: a bottle of wine and pills a bum gave me for my birthday when he was asleep.

The next afternoon I awoke and finished the last drop of wine. With breakfast over I thought about lunch.

My decision to change my identity was fueled by pure survival instincts going back to the beginning of time, or at least to the invention of the watch.

With the watch pawned I changed my name to Van Gogh and started to paint. If my wife wouldn't take me back, I'd cut off my ear and send it to a prostitute. That'd show her.

Under the Sign by David Mac

We lived under the sign of carburetor. We slept in the rooms behind the shop. We made carburetors grow up right. What else could we do, living under the sign we did?

My brother loved a girl who lived under the sign of comb and scissors. They ran away down the street and settled in a storefront with a sign of a point can over it. They sell paint. They blend their own colors with clay and berries from the fields and mix it with a yard stick they bought from my cousin, who lives under the sign of the ruler.

My older sister took shelter under the sign of the red shoes. Mother shushes us when we mention her.

My younger sister became angry and moved in with the other angry people under the sign of the clenched fist.

This left me the only child with mother and father under the sign of carburetor. But fuel injection and dust orphaned our business and we became lonely for custom.

I went north for work. I live under a sign of stars. Staring up, I wonder what shapes they form. What wonderful things are they advertising. What dreams are they selling for me now.

Things His Father Gave Him by Brandi Wells

I tell him it's a myth and male pattern baldness doesn't run on the mother's side. Thinking of his father's smooth tanned head, he pulls his bangs back, leans forward, nose almost touching the mirror. His hot breath obscures the image, silky Pantene hair, and he asks if I'll leave him. I tell him I'll buy him a powdered wig. He wonders if the gene is recessive or dominant. We set up a Punnett square, guessing or hoping his mother is little a and big A. I tell him maybe it's fifty-fifty and not to worry, but to quit wearing that yellow tie his father gave him.

That's a Code 60, Dispatch by Damien Dressick

You can't, in all good conscience, say you're surprised to find Chuck Palahniuk shaking a naked, upside-down hooker in an attempt to rattle free a stolen gram of cocaine. You're also not shocked this is occurring at a book signing in a crowded mall outside Indianapolis. Nor are you astonished, not really, that he is shouting, "Give back my stash, you lowlife slit!"

What does shock the loose monkey shit right out of you is Chuck's not realizing that because the bitch is upside down, he's only shaking the coke further into her nose. Funny how sometimes conceptions of one's heroes can be simultaneously expanded and blown apart.

"Whom the Gods would destroy," you reflect. Or perhaps, the God within each of us must destroy the man or, more precisely, the humanity—so as to be revealed, the way cyanide leaching facilitates gold extraction.

Sure, you're also wondering if maybe you shouldn't have chased that pint of bonded whiskey with a quarter sheet of blotter acid. But topping all of this off is—of course—now's most salient question, "How the hell did Chuck talk you into holding this goddamn whore's other fucking leg? Chuck? Chuck? You there buddy? Chuck?"