

M u d L u s c i o u s I s s u e S i x t e e n

[ words by Parker Tettleton, Robert Kloss, Ethan Joella, Stacia Fleegal, Thomas Levy, Jonas Williams, Forrest Roth, Russell Jaffe, Ashley Farmer, Molly Prentiss, Gregory Sherl, Stefanie Freele, M. G. Martin, & Peter Kispert ]

What I Want & How I Live  
by Parker Tettleton

After I write a poem I want to look good. After drinking I want to look good writing a poem. After I look good & want to write a poem I'm drinking.

I haven't written any poems -- lived at a mercurial distance. My shoes are on in the dark & savings isn't saving anything. I pretend you're my mother whether I hate you or not. There's one thing I won't consider my father: hello.

The Sun Choked with Barbed Wire: the landscapes of The Alligators of Abraham  
by Robert Kloss

Remember now those still mornings and the snow shrouded hillsides, soon gone to gray and black for the fall of soot, the constant billowing from the smoke stakes of leather factories, a landscape of sheep and pig and calf skins dried draped over lines and the clouds of flies and the soil sodden from the runoff, a landscape of rivers choked by steam ships heaped with maggoty skins and traders enmeshed in flies, a landscape of fathers slow burning fields until the skies seem smote with locusts, until skies seemed choked to blackness, a landscape of cobbled streets and brick buildings, of butcher shops and haberdashers and grocers and barbers, a landscape of alligators in the tall grasses, covered in mud from the belly of the river, their faces and eyes and snouts lost in the tangle of the dead leaves and the weeds, a landscape of alligators grown fat from corpses mounded in rivers, bulged and asleep along the banks, a landscape of alligators sunning their mouths, a landscape brimmed with the blood exuberance of mothers and fathers and children, their red faces cheering and singing and the flags they waved, while marching bands led the way, batons and tubas and clarinets, young boys and men dressed in hand me down uniforms from wars past, the stained suits of fathers and uncles and grandfathers, suits of wool and dust and mothballs, a landscape where alligators crash the grocer's shelves, crunch the peach tins and slurp the syrup, a landscape where the dried brown blood of civilians smeared on cobbled streets, a landscape of bison, of mooing and flies, a town of fur and horns, a city constructed with this woolen timber, a city of churches built with hooves and horns, of general stores constructed with fur and meat, floors of ribs and legs, of streets paved with skulls and teeth, and how soon these buildings decayed and collapsed, and soon this town became a town of embalmers, the smog of this town became the fumes of their chemicals, the banners unfurled when embalmers moved in and the wide windows of embalmer's shops and there in the glint of the glass pane embalmers in leather aprons, their sleeves rolled, and a naked yellowed figure recumbent along their table, a landscape of militiamen lobbing burning rags into mounded alligator parts, a landscape clogged with charcoaled bodies, a landscape lit into fires, a landscape of smoke musked with swamp and peat and rotten fish, a landscape where the flames burned blue and green and yellow, a landscape where the forests are forests of scorched leather, a landscape of leather and murder, of militia men wearing gasmasks and burning ancient hillsides, a landscape of the limp bodies of alligators fallen and slumped in rolls of barbed wire, on the lawns and in the streets, a landscape of wide milky eyes, a landscape of alligators hoisted from gas lamp poles as if by warning while landlocked gulls swooped and tore chunks of meat, a landscape of cobbled streets piled to either side with the smoldering arms and heads and tails of alligators, a landscape

where the rats scurried and found little to gnaw, a landscape where the emaciated children of the forests, of the apartment homes, of the shanty cities darted and chewed and settled for the crisped hide and they settled for what they found in the bones, what they cracked open and sucked, these children sallow and hued in soot, blotted for the light of a sky always in darkness for the smoke of fires, of leather factories, a landscape where the sun seemed as smothered with sackcloth, where the sun seemed as choked black with barbed wire.

Admissions  
by Ethan Joella

The bathroom at the department store. When someone says to envision a calm, quiet place, I go right to that bathroom. I walk the long hall, my feet trying to step in the patterns of the brown tiles, and when I open that door, I've found my own island. The cool air and scent of pink bathroom soap. I could just stand there at the urinal forever. Drag a sleeping bag in and make my life at the end of that hall.

During those vision tests in elementary school, I squinted when I read the letters on the wall. I wanted blindness. And glasses. Black poindexters.

I am fond of my broken pinky. It juts out of the way of everything like Florida. Florida on my hand.

I sabotaged an election in high school so I could be treasurer. And everyone believed I'd won. That's what always gets me. That they just bought it.

In marching band, I told the director my saxophone reed was broken so that I could play the cymbals. Shit, those things. You've never had real power until you've banged cymbals together. That crash. That isolating bang. You can't even mess up the cymbals. You just crash when you think it belongs. Squeeze the pads on either side and just let the metal plates come together when you want that punctuation in there. The cymbals are up to you.

My brothers and I stole purple gumballs from the corner market and buried them in the backyard. I wonder what they became under that dirt, and I wonder what was the point of having to risk all that just to cover up our winnings.

When I was a teenager, this waitress at the beach gave me her phone number once, and she wrote it on her Guest Check. She walked away, and I noticed she wore cowboy boots. As close to a novel as my life has come.

from Anti-Memories  
by Stacia Fleegal

Warning

A large bird flies ostentatiously by  
and everything above the bird is daylight  
and everything below the bird is night.  
The bird has four wings, two for each of us.  
I never wanted us to be only  
shadows. This bird isn't even flapping— wait,  
a sunset is a sunrise for us, a sun  
rising down to meet us, a sunset is an up-  
rising, over our heads, a set-up— wait,  
your hair is turning silver, a fog.  
I am suddenly shucking sweet corn in

your kitchen.

Wait, once more. This is

your fantasy, not mine. That bird was just  
a storm crow cloud.

### Synapsing

The cage is reinforced titanium,  
but I did not check this prior to  
descending. The ocean, too, is steel,  
a blue I've only seen in artifacts,  
until the water purples from the blood  
of chum. The sharks are sleek torpedic  
beauty. Can they sense my electric  
awe? At once, the largest angles back,  
swims right at me, and suddenly I know  
she's wondering the same of me, and why

I am a prisoner. Her eyes melt the bars,

and then I am in my little brother's bedroom  
holding his shark-in-a-jar. My eye to opaque  
membrane—the glass becomes a titanium cage,  
the briny blue tidal waves out, and I  
am left cradling a corpse.

### Intuiting

I put the tiny onyx turtle on  
the floor, the soapstone owl above the sky.  
I pick up the phone before it rings.  
I no longer need a weather report  
because birds fly like whales when it rains:  
rolling through air-water, water-air,  
like a hand out a car window. Someone  
is going to die tomorrow. It won't be me.  
I can move the turtle off the road,  
touch the whale, listen for the owl...  
but they could vanish under my senses.  
What totem-making stays a thunderstorm,  
a human being? I must carve myself from  
falling rock, then leap from under me.

You Are Some Things  
by Thomas Patrick Levy

### You Are An Alarm

When I wake you are an alarm. Sometimes you're outside, around the corner. Sometimes there's a cop car at the edge of the alley. I do illegal things every day. I cringe when I see them. I see you and cringe but not because you're beautiful. Sometimes I wake through dreams of children. Sometimes the children are made

from bits of scrap metal. Sometimes I can't help but dream these dreams. I do these illegal things and think THE AMERICAN FLAG IS MADE OF BLACK AND WHITE STRINGS. You see, every flag tears in the wind and only context can tell if I am shredded or crying. Only you can tell if I am made of cleaning substances or love.

#### You Are a Wall of Birds

When I wake you are a wall of birds. I only want to shower you. I only want to wake and find that you are a wall of bricks. Sometimes you never move and sometimes you are covered with light. Sometimes I try to go back to sleep but mostly I shower alone and think THIS WILL NEVER END. I clean myself alone. I think THIS WILL NEVER END and it does. The damp towel, the broken air.

#### You Are Sometimes Not a Ghost

When I wake you are sometimes not a ghost and I try so hard to dream bowls of clay drying in the daylight but you push me and I crack. You see even when I want to be happy I am a trashcan full of muck. I am rotting mostly. The bottoms of my feet are ruined. The bottoms of my feet are not soft but made of nails. I walk on nails but not peacefully. I walk on nails in a rage made of the torn cardboard of a cereal box. I leave it for you to find at night, I leave it for you to find at night when you go to bed wonderfully, your shirt dampened by your hair, your neck knotted.

#### Ranch-Ready Crop-Tops by Jonas Williams

#### Vocabulary

1. Soyil. Registered trademark. A product combining soy sauce and peanut oil in one aerosol-can blend.
2. Clammy Soyil. Soyil with clam flavor.
3. EETT. Acronym for Electronically Echoed Tempo Tap. To EETT is to transmit a tapped rhythm wirelessly to a receptive pacemaker or bass-enhanced pacethumper, allowing an EETTee to enjoy bodily the finger-fresh rhythm.
4. Fry. Friend-Try. EETTING a nonfriend as an invitation to friendship, an offer presumably evaluated on the basis of rhythmic compatibility.
5. Chew. The fried's process of deciding whether to accept the fryer's friendship.
6. Regurge. To tap back (or forward) what has EETTened you.
7. Stir-Fry. A remixed Friend-Try, often regurgated. An EETTING out of what's been EETTened in. Also, to cook in a pan with soyil over high heat, stirring continuously.
8. Harvest. A hard vest worn by the EETTer and tapped to transmit rhythms wirelessly to an EETTee. Available in neons, earth tones, and holographics.
9. Soulp. To Soul-Drop, or drop soul effects.
10. Secure. To cure with sea salt or otherwise program.
11. Homeland. The fantastic vegan realm of hommus, a common setting for children's chicktales.
12. Uncle Salm. Unclean Salmon.
13. Name. Natural memory. Memory, especially of rhythms, not supplemented prosthetically. Also, to admit to natural memory. A comic term.
14. Unname. Unnatural memory, or to admit to it. Usually, rhythmic memory stored in a harvest card or basket. A political term.
15. Durt. Registered Trademark. Yogurt for dogs, specially designed to facilitate canine digestion. Previously marketed unsuccessfully as dogurt.

#### Applied Vocabulary

Hands aslip with clammy soyl meant we harvested sloppy EETTs. The neighbor was frying, but we brats wouldn't chew St. Reuban--we regurged a chicken stir fry on the neighbor: not a true fry, not a get-down-means-get-in tap-slap on the back, but a cowardly offense, a wetly beaten, snidely slack, soyily digits-stray array, all projected from a neat range. Hey, we thought the neighbor ticked tackily, thought that friendless fryer tepid. But we know now the vengeance of cold leftovers.

We rounded up the stock. Prepped the slick soyl. Cooked lunch. Chowd on the patio. We soulpd sweetly. We sliced hot beats and overrode the muffler. Our own clichés we cut mere units from the heart, comfort-close.

Going in, tapped out, we found the neighbor'd invaded, cleaned our counters, swapped out our grub for uncle salm. We'd been clap-trapped, clammed up harvesting each other, neglecting to eat out the ready neighbor. To mend such offense--well, you proffer a nail, or deep-drop the patcher's pail. But this tangent had gone grazed our jerky octagon en route to somewheres unlocatable. So we worked our shrug muscles.

The neighbor'd been bitter before uncle salm arrived, before frying. The dogs were in defense mode. No regrets, no moral--we wiped the soyl off our hands, and more's at the store. We're beating it--this is no homeland, we're not half adoze vegan chicks twittering all day in our sleepy pods, and our salm needs secured. Patience makes for a cold cut.

Patience we'd tried, say, in the long line outside the artist's clinic. "Break our hearts," those waiting repeated. Finally I said, "Instead--". But "Break our peanut-brittle hearts," they recommended, truly threateningly intensely. "Instead--" we--two insteading ones--verbalized speakingly. "Fry us in spittle and tear-duct-droppings," they redunderated. "Instead--" but what words we--ones thrice, twos twice, a band parting from the dopplegang--puffed, were (they claimed commercially) uncharismatic farts, whose hot air, though, did buoy our balloon, and we looked down at the line. Would one day the whole long line thump-thunk a pulse in choral rhythm? Or would those links of hard-heart chain snap--dry unflexed and tedious? We thrummed our thighs, first from jitters, then to bypass the mind's old dawdle. We say you need a heart in shape for EETTING, beating not breaking.

Are the dogs in play mode? Has your noodle hit your hard high hat and does your eardrum trill?

We clear our names. We unname the past. What was was what is. What was is now what is had been. This is what we come to: the sounds of spilled durt slopping. It's cool between our toes. We grab it up--it webs our fingers, suggests another way to EETT--the durt moves us--slick and viscous--we thumb-drum, we pretzel ourselves to toe-tap, we tickle forth a harvest treat--to neighbors, to you, everyone vested, dapper tappers to move us in due durty turn. We've deleted the uncle salm, we've initated the crop. The neighbors no longer neigh. The dogs are in sleep mode, the durt all ours. We are, to you, our rhythm, aren't we? You are now our rhythm, aren't we? We are rhythm.

Nocturnes  
by Forrest Roth

breathe aghast for her on mantle's heat, and not a solemn word remains to be lacquered, to be polished by his linseed, but by command of hearth in her unobstructed view, note by note, blushing out oil of sanguine bane she had torn from roots beneath his stead, all at once aflutter and shielding herself from its instrument, conceived without blessing, a patter left too sensate at many obligations.

Forthcoming from the author:  
by Russell Jaffe

for Eric Asboe

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Consented Subjugation: A Montage Of Rejected Wedding Proposals In Malls Or At Sports Games

Waiting In Line For Subway Between Two Loud, Obnoxious Families Way Too Concerned About the Placement of Tomatoes on Their Sandwiches: Yep, Another Essay on the Postmodern Condition by a Young White Guy With a Beard, Glasses, No Kids, and a Family Cellphone Plan

Only the (En)Title(d): An Essay That is Just This Title Right Here

False Fortifications: As You Read This, I'm Preparing to Jump Out and Scream and Scare You

Farm Town  
by Ashley Farmer

The Devil

He was a she and she staggered me. The trees grew preposterous and twisted. Sparks descended from what should have been simple morning mist. The men fled Log Trucks, snagged discount airfare, signed off. She smelled of lavender. She quote-unquote wreaked havoc: dead, the sheep fell into expensive moments of sea and coins unlocked from our grasp. Gold seeped into the ground tainting the water supply with money. Only the women stayed to watch from windows as she distorted dirt paths and crushed the roof of the Inn with her fist. Only the women remained as she stripped miles of sage and shook the pasture like a blanket, tumbling the cattle away. The Devil walked into my Modern Mansion. The Devil asked why are there Merry-Go-Rounds and no children. The Devil paused at The Family Dinner Table and asked why no family. In Farm Town, life can't be broken nor made. Instead, it's a tape played and replayed, an algorithm of acres and time and assets. The Devil covered my fence, my house, my life with quote-unquote snow. The Devil came to Farm Town and asked us all, "Do you want to go home now?"

Watering Cans

In the valley of love and delight and I'm thirsty. I work the land and clods of dirt in my hands retain vague shapes of you. The day shuts down. A solo stately steer stands on the horizon like an investor. A voice is chanting, the fog is lifting. Inside by the fire I'll strip out of my cartoon, stretch across the pelt, peruse suggestive books on seeds and how they germinate (the reaching shapes they take!), and dream that you emerge from a calculated grid of something green with a jukebox slung across your back like a folk hero. What happens next is hard to say, but it's positively 22<sup>nd</sup> century Romantic American: it rains, our connection is dropped across the golden valley, a jealous farmer torches the farm in the name of New Sincerity and we assume some modern identities as the pastures flame behind us. We could ford rivers together, float wires. We could navigate any realm that's clearer, obvious. A home without instructions that would have us.

Daily Lottery

Failing at one world means nothing in another.

Little Bo Peep

It's God's day but I wear thigh highs beneath my Bible. Maybe that's why He took my flock from me. My lambkin lost, I feel forsaken, fragile. I witness crooks and necks that crane toward this skirt impractical for tending sheep or nailing up Have You Seen Me? posters. My heart bled once when they lost their tails. Again when I looked out at the hillocks and thought about them missing me. (That night, I'd find their woolly nubs nailed to a tree). I'm a girl on the go, owning nothing now, owing on this ridiculous get-up. What good is pretty, petty unencumberance when you have no reason to be? I find a shitty dive with Photohunt a buck a game. It's afternoon. In the dark I drink draft and play addition or subtraction of body parts and black straps and wisps of hair on naked women. I'm foolish, but not so easily fooled: in one photo she's whole, in the other incomplete.

How the West Was Lost  
by Molly Prentiss

Before you were born there was cashmere. Before that: mountain fever. Frontiers were at the front and blood soup at the back and irrigation in the middle, waiting to be invented. Now you colonize the colonies because pioneering is in fashion. Now you lament the Pacific in passing, mason jar it into your collective Western memory. Now you love too many people and you're in trouble: just one of the luxuries of not dying.

Leave California: or you'll die there. Settle where you can never settle down. Get your period in a futuristic pharmacy, blood on the trousers you've worn to chop wood in. And what are tri-state areas anyway? And where can you get a bit of venison around here? And triangles are the strongest shape, but not emotionally. Here: you must have an odd number of tattoos but an even number of lovers.

Now we abandon in a new way: not by way of pines whose roots are in the river, not by rationed butter, animal tracks. Four dimensions of space to feel lonely in, now: ways to find connection on the internet. He doesn't eat meat to survive: he bleeds. He tells you your eyes are made of chocolate, in an email. And maybe you red tail hawked him. And maybe you moved side by side through the Sierras. Either way in a wagon, sleeping, alone but together under the big country's satellites.

Before you were born there was monogamy. Before that: the Mother Lode. Now you've ditched redwoods for red lipstick and New York has ruined your liver. You rush not toward gold but toward lightness: a pilgrimage of defiance to where you came from. Your parents won't say it out loud but they are thinking it. That you are the selfish wanderers. The Donner Partiers. That you are the opposite of organdy, of lace, of a hand-held map. You exist on a frontier of cigarettes, riding the saddle of the subway, allowing desire to feel like survival.

And you don't know what cholera feels like but this could be it.

This fashionable heartache of the East.

Maybe he will eat your eyes.

I Always Need a Little Leveling  
by Gregory Sherl

I want to be held. I don't care if she's drunk. I don't tell my therapist this but my therapist doesn't tell me what he does after our sessions every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, so I think we're even. I always need a little leveling so I stay away from seesaws. Myths are dumb, like trying to touch the top of a tall woman. I text K Come kiss me where my freckles would be if I had freckles. I am always holding my own hand at grocery stores. I don't buy anything, I just watch the cans fall and dent. Today I get a haircut. I take a Valium before going into the salon. The lady puts my head under a faucet. The Valium kicks in as she's putting the towel around my neck. Water runs but my mind stays. She has nails I wish I had met before. I tell her Never stop. I think about falling asleep under a waterfall. I think about being so young my whole body fits in this sink. Briefly, I think about the girl I fucked before the last girl I fucked. She had a tattoo on the right side of her ribs I always forgot existed. There were leaves on the tattoo, a flower, something always growing out of her. Last night Adam told me you can get high off morning seeds. Do you eat them? I asked. I think you make a tea he said, and then we both drank from cold mugs. Life is a plural thing. Later, at the post office, a woman yells about the discomfort of her parcel: its edges are bruised, the top dented, something that shouldn't rattle rattles. I would still drink from it if it were a keg. I don't stand in doorways when someone wants to close a door. I've never wanted a hammock so badly.

Thin Blue Strip  
by Stefanie Freele

There are those who view our ribbon-lives as safe. We live on a thin blue strip of water. They live in a red square. Smoke rests on white triangles while others eat brown stones. I need to tell you how dangerous it is to be straddled by banks of purple and bronze. This is why I dream of islands fluffed white in winter, strong by seventeen pines. Only once did I make the assumption that dripping morning leaves were accessible to lick. The island stretches upward toward an owl who overpowers the rats. He's got kick, that owl. There is also this to admire: the one lone boat I row on the lavender, rust days, or even pumpkin afternoons, depending on the season or my need for hue. Always, the loaded one beneath the seat cushion and the knife tucked under life-vest straps.

fortified legs  
by M. G. Martin

in one week we will have not talked for one week. this makes my furniture sag, frowning at the corners of their various furniture mouths. i've been baking a cake for you for two years & it will be finished in one week. i will have to take pictures of it, sing to it & blow out its candles while you are in another kitchen eating something not called cake. i like to think that we are each a leg connected to the same body, a somebody of small importance, someone of mediocrity, connected to the ground by two vitamin d fortified legs. but what to do with this cake? i might wear it as a helmet. perhaps, i can put a leash on it & name it 'pet rock,' walking it from one side of the kitchen table to the other. most likely, i will lie in bed, cuddling the cake, staring at the sloppy cursive. the sloppy cursive of frosted gel that says, 'i'm trying.' i like to think about living in a furniture store, where the leather doesn't smell like you & where i'm reminded of children eating a cheap, supermarket birthday cake, not knowing any better, about anything.

Procedure Man  
by Peter Kispert

has zinnias bruising his backyard, where seeds burrow concentrically, as prayers do. Sandboxes pressed like sunflowers. Everything maximum and earthbound, trash-burned in Utah. A man lives here. A man with staircases and eyelids, organs the thickness of bronze pipe. A whistling lawn on the backs of his hands. His woman sings in a coal mine. Her kitchen: cinnamon, potpourri, brown rice. Both of them. He sits here. A man with the silence of warm ether. Risking and dousing. It is hunting season. Holding her there, as planned: neck, shoulder, elbow.