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The Normal Review

Fall 2016

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A Literary and Arts Publication

Montclair State University

Fall 2016

Cover art: *Winter in the Wood*
by Dominique Behrens

Cover design by
Kyle Coan

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Montclair State University
Dickson Hall 346
Montclair, NJ 07043
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the English Department
at Montclair State University, Inc.
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Printed by:
Direct Print Impressions
33 Fairfield Pl,
West Caldwell, NJ 07006

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How to Submit

Only undergraduate and graduate students at Montclair State University are eligible to submit.

The work must be the original creative work of the attributed author or artist.

Specific submission guidelines and other information:

thenormalreviewmsu.wordpress.com

Questions, comments, concerns? Ask the editors.

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Wolf

Elena Teixeira

The Common Cold

Jessica Schwartz

He was winter and I was spring,
a thing which he had never known.
In silence he came with wind and snow,
cold fingers aching for some form of life.
Under the ground where darkness is sun,
he sought refuge in light, a thing I'd become.
Delightfully found and colors fleeting,
cold eyes saw love, until he discovered summer—

A thing that he now wanted to know;
a thing that I would come to lose.

Downtown Debris

Frances McGrew

The rain paints the pavement
with smudged streetlamps
while stoplights bleed
onto the slick concrete.

My camera refuses to recreate this hour.

The lens captures a muddy black. There are no lights,
just blurs.

Midnight rain drenches mansions and
crumbling one-bedrooms alike.

Burnt-out cigarettes and plastic bottles,
receipts lined with age and disgust
all wash down street sides.

It comforts me to see litter only in one place.

The world knows I am not an artist,
and yet it lets me play
at so-called speaking pictures.

Raindrops streak my hair, my shirt,
turning the colors darker.

Soon brown and blue will be indistinguishable from black.

The reflections of passersby are trapped in puddles,
their boneless limbs shimmering near the surface
as they wait for the next couple to walk by.

The downpour slows; stoplights turn green.

Hair Like Van Gogh

Danielle Weidner

She bathed her hair with butterscotch milk
and plantain bananas every Tuesday, pinned
it between clothespin grooves afterward and
hung it out to dry. I heard it soaked up the sun's
photons basking in sunflower corn oil and I can
still recall the way it tasted like the shell of pineapple
or eucalyptus honey emitting an exuberance of promptly
picked lemons from Mrs. Pinagin's yard—oh the way it felt,
sparse hairs of fresh barley, seedlings of that yellow pepper she
squished in between her nimble fingers every Tuesday morning.
But

who could forget the way it shined like citrus satin stitched down
with gold's

tongue, as if honeybees weaved their comb into her follicles with-
out her even noticing.

Overnight

Alyssa Shugayev

The Three Diamond Door beckons,
with a sign spelling out specials in liquid chalk.
Brooklyn Lager's on sale—
DOLLAR OFF DRAFT.

Chit-chats hard to catch.
Shift the chairs
until two pairs of knees touch.
Order another round.

Soon we are watercolors,
warping with LED lights in the window.
Open signs radiate in neon.

Follow the flimsy limbs.
The four-floor walk-up's
down the street.

Fingers survey the shelves of vinyl.
A soundtrack for stalling.
Say when, Susanna.
The metro service is slowing soon.



Birds of a Feather Flock Together

Babee Garcia
photography

They Say When I'm 80

Danielle Weidner

They say when I'm 80, I'll be thin enough for you to sip wine from my collarbones. And that you'll have to occasionally polish my eyeballs as if they were glass orbs. And they say you'll have to spoon-feed me the way I spoon-fed you, because everything will slip through my hands like drapes. And they say you'll have to speak like cracks in whips of thunder, and perhaps remind me time and again what rhubarb pie smells like. And maybe sometimes, they say, you'll have to resurrect the moment you cradled my tender breasts; extracted honey dew from my milk and cooed at its suppleness.

But you'll say, *here mama*—cup my old camera in the cusp of your palms like the feathering wing of a bat. Press my eye to its lens the way the wall of a fishbowl caves in on itself, and everything will come flooding back. What the sky felt like that one morning. What it was like to see my mom cry. What it was like to hear me cry just before collapsing onto the shower floor under the weight of reality's hand squishing my face down against tile; steaming droplets dripping into the canal of my back the way he did one Tuesday night. Or how my dad always smelled like grass.

And I'll continue to succumb to the overbearing quench of memory dry-heaving down my neck. And you'll egg me on, pressing that lens closer while whispering, *they say if you want to know what someone fears losing, look at what they photograph.*

quiet

Anijeh Green

I let my words
hide behind my
throat like a shy
child too afraid to
introduce herself.

I have been a
mother to these
words and what
a pity it is that I
have not taught
them to fly.



Mellow Meadows

Mia Rico
acrylic paint

Dark Side



Dominique Behrens

Eyes on the Road

Monica Archer

There is a water bottle
on the side of Route 3.
It's blue and it's plastic
and it's dirty and old.

Reusable, but unused.

Just a piece of garbage
lying on the side of the road.

I look at that water bottle every day.

I take comfort in knowing it's there.
Through every season of
the last year and a half, it
has remained in the same spot.

Sun beating down on it,
leaves gathered around,
covered in snow,
it stays where it began.

Whatever music I'm listening to,
whatever emotions I'm feeling,

through elation from a grade
or depression from a breakup,
the water bottle is there.

What a concept,
what a constant,
what a weird thing to notice
on the side of the road.

But there it is every day,
a dirty blue water bottle,
unmoving,
and unimposing,
but such a big part
of my daily routine.



Enigma

Jabril Abdullah
paint

Child Within

Christa Callamari

I was full, just a little too full.

The nurse had called us in order. I was in the first group, the “largest” group.

I could not run fast; I was out of breath fast.

My maternal family was all overweight. Genetic perhaps?

The only solution at the tips of my fingers was something I learned in health class. One finger? Pointer made sense, but the middle finger is longer. Definitely two fingers.

It was just one time. I was just relieving an overly full stomach. And it worked.

How to start an article about one’s fall into bulimia? The fullness, the windedness, the genetic fear factor, my enabling health class, or perhaps blame. I could point those vomit-covered fingers in all directions, but that would clean up nothing and likely drip a mess everywhere. Perhaps the worst part of the story is that I did tell someone. Before my thirteen-year-old self took the plunge into a world of calorie counting, restricting, shameful hiding while eating, secretive purging, and dehydration, I did tell someone. I reached for help; I was begging to be saved. I wanted someone to advocate for me. My mouth was too full of fingers and puke to speak for itself. And besides, I didn’t know what to say or who to say it to.

She was a friend. A twenty-year-old friend, and she had

more important worries. Her at-the-time-boyfriend was cheating. No one knew it yet, but one day she would marry him, they'd have three boys, and he would cheat at every stage of their relationship. They would fight and he would leave her. And I would still be vomiting over toilets and trash cans.

Actually, I don't even need fingers, toilets, and trash cans anymore. I once read on a pro-mia website that you can train your stomach to push food back up just by convulsing it. No more fingers, no more burning throat, no more smell trail. Though sometimes it gives me hiccups.

Four and a half years of perfect secrecy, then a near-death purge landed me in the hospital. Now my parents knew, my siblings knew, but no one knew what to do.

I wanted, I needed, someone who knew what to do.

For a while I was given this. It was a therapy center with group sessions and parent support classes. Renfrew, a center specifically for eating disorders.

Which is what I had. No one had ever said it before, eating disorder, bulimic. Which is only partly true. I wasn't solely bulimic; I had created a marriage of bulimia and anorexia. The two came together in long periods of starvation followed by the purging of anything deemed unacceptable. This dynamic duo took my 150-pound eighth-grade body and turned it into a ninety-nine-pound high-school junior.

I had needed an advocate when I was thirteen; I needed access to one for four years while I struggled alone; again I needed someone when I was seventeen and my parents had no idea what

to do for me. But more than ever, I needed someone to express what I was thinking when they decided that a summer's stay at a religious center was the best place for me. The people there were not counselors, were not therapists; they were not trained. They did not know about eating disorders and the delicate, fragile state of my shattered mind. They knew about the Bible and they knew about sinners. To them I was not suffering from an illness, a disorder. Instead, I was plagued by the devil, struggling with a vain sin of my heart. I needed to find the light and repent.

Needless to say, my health plummeted to emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. I was overwhelmed by my own inability. Inability to heal without a god, inability to believe in a god, inability to escape.

I have never been so grateful for the school year to begin.

That October I turned eighteen. Broken, angry, and bitter, but skinny, which after all, was the goal. As a senior in high school, I eventually fell into stride with a therapist who would teach me how to speak for myself. Of course, we had to first remove those fingers from my mouth before I could talk.

And now I'll try.

Try to talk; to advocate; to heal.

Try to counter the extensive harm endured from pro-disorder websites.

Try to explain that people whose minds and souls are dominated by an eating disorder don't always see what others see. We may not view our body proportions as an outsider does. And we certainly don't think we are sick. Sometimes we don't even con-

sider ourselves as dieting. Try to explain to you that your classmate seated behind you; your co-worker butting elbows with you at the all-too-small register counter space; your peer in the cafeteria pretending to study for finals while really hoping to catch your eye, may presently be suffering from an internal conflict with severe physical consequences.

And yes, I acknowledge that pens, papers, textbooks, and notebooks do not necessarily mean one is actually being studious.

Instead of standing up, instead of standing out, we allow societal norms to define our expectations of beauty. Morphing what we desire into unattainable demands. We emphasize disproportionate, excessive thinness as the ideal feminine. We shape man's body with a rolling abdomen and make muscularity synonymous with masculinity. Definitions which are detrimental for health and self-esteem.

At least I know I've never looked like I belong on the cover of a magazine. Should I want to?

Men and women with eating disorders, in the process of recovering or having recovered from one, will tell you that society and media play a fundamental role in the illness. For this reason, I believe our largest, most powerful target is our society and our media's portrayal of people. This target has the power to make a change. Photoshopping magazine models and portraying only people of particular physique and features benefits no one.

Already a shift has begun. More catalogues choose to use clothing models of various shapes and sizes.

Yet, as a society, we bombard ourselves with diets and workouts

and skinny Barbies for our little girls.

Changing the collective societal mindset must become a priority. This is just one way we can begin to heal our disordered sons and daughters at their foundations.

So, advocate for them. Parents, therapists, professors, peers, friends of those surviving or lost from eating disorders, and victims of the illness; advocate to society around you. Hold them accountable for their judgements and shaming misconceptions.

Advocate, because the illness will only grow.

Advocate, because adolescents and adults alike do not need to continue to suffer.

Advocate, because when your stomach is always clenched in a tight knot that feels neither hungry nor full, when your throat constantly burns with the jabbing ghost of your own fingers, when your head never ceases to swirl with a heavy fog that lacks water, when the very beating of your heart shoots pain in all directions and pounds against your fragile sternum, when acidic fire scorching your esophagus becomes your normal, you will forget that you are in pain. You forget that you need help. You forget that you need advocating. And so, we may fail to speak for ourselves. Because this is normal. I am OK. I am not sick. I am healthy.

Bulimia. It's nicknamed the "slow suicide"; we may not realize it, but we are slowly killing our own bodies. I am killing my own body.

So, advocate.



STAY OUT OF THE BASEMENT

DANIMATION
ART BY DANIEL R. HILTON

Stay out of the Basement

Daniel R. Hilton



Rockefeller Center

Valerie Jaretsky
photography

A Fallen Tree

Editor's Choice

Monica K. Mills

The haggard woman sat stiff and somber,
rigid on the log, she never moved
—not to blink or smile or sigh
as browns and greens and golden reds
crept close between the fog around her.

Her feet were numbed,
rooted into dry earth by knobby heels
and the fleas that raced atop her shoulders
knew life only by the shallow inhalations of her chest.

Ebony vines coiled, twisted, and tangled
at the top of her skull in an unruly canopy,
blocking sprinkles of moonshine from her eyes—
wide and dull and decorated silver
by tears that clung to them
like leaves afraid to fall at dusk of summer.

Thin, frail branches curled around her
naked flesh as she clutched her being,
a chilling haze pressing densely into the
grooves of her mind while forest danced around her.
Autumn had come, the crash, the crunch.
Still, when the woman died, she made no sound.

Ivory Wings

Gypsy Moth

You told me I had outgrown the ground,
that I belonged in the sky.
So you adorned me with ivory wings,
saying that I deserved to fly.
But they came with a price.
I should have seen the signs.
The freedom you entrusted me with
was never truly mine.
With those wings, I was bound to you.
A sparrow in a cage.
Something to be admired until all that beauty fades.
Now I no longer want the sky, like I did before.
Mutilating myself, for it was you that I outwore.
Plucking every feather
till you don't own me anymore.

dialogous

Kristy Lim

do you want taco salad?

are you tired?

did you fall asleep?

are you upset?

what's the matter?

why won't you respond?

did something happen?

are you mad at a friend?

are you mad at an enemy?

a teacher?

a pet?

yourself?

will you say something?

will you talk to your mother?

will you talk to your father?

why not?

don't you know you can trust us?

please?

...

.....

.....

i want to swallow the moon.
i've been awake for centuries.
the city never sleeps at night.
no...
matter is the substance of which any—
you never answer my texts, so.
ask cnn. or fox. or someone.
companionship is subjective.
barking mad, actually.
my future?
cupcake hasn't been home for hours.
#yourselfie
say something, i'm giving up on you.
the golden girls is on.
it's getting quiet downstairs.
i do not knot.
don't you know?
please?
!!!
!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!!!



Into the Distance

Masuma Begum

happy

Anijeh Green

I pray and prey for it—
I hunt for it in the psalms;
I listen for it in the wind;
I devour it every time.

—

You're 14, and you're staring in the mirror, pinching your stomach, your thighs, your arms, because a boy at school called you fat. You don't know him, but he broke your heart. Every reflection makes your stomach clench, your breath staccato, your neck legato. You wish you could be invisible, so skinny that you'd be invisible.

Who is on the other side of the wall? Why do they care how much you weigh? If you had a cookie today or not? If you didn't go running for an hour after school? Two hours? Three?

Why do they want you to be so thin?

Why are you becoming so thin that you're fading away?

Why are they trying to make you disappear?

—

Kesha vs. "Dr. Luke"

—

You join Tinder, a college dating app, because after all, high school is over and you need a man. Or so they all say. Finally running into the love of your life was like looking for a pearl in a pool of angry, overenthusiastic, horny crabs all with rejection issues that manifest into the habit of cursing out every girl who doesn't answer within 20 minutes.

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:30pm: hey! you're so pretty!

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:40pm: hey!

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:45pm: hello??

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:47pm: bitch

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:50pm: you're not that hot anyway, your hair is ugly

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:50pm: you have fat arms

Tinder Match #36 @ 3:50pm: stupid bitch

—

Carry That Weight

Dragging, drooping, never dropping.

Stooping, swinging, never stopping.

This is where he hurt you.

This is where he ruined you.

That is how he walked free.

That is how they all forgot.

This is how you carry it on your shoulders.

This, this is where you used to sleep.

This is how you will make them remember.

—

A large boy slams into you while walking through the hallway at school, knocking you over. “I didn’t even see you!” he exclaims. *Why not? you think. You’re always looking down on me, anyway.*

You work at a pizzeria run by men who run a pizzeria. Since you were warned not to wear revealing shirts while working with men, you spend your entire shift sweating in an oversized sweater; none of them listen to you when you talk because you forgot to wear makeup. One day you walk into work after an interview at the university you attend and they ask you if you were on a date. You say, “No, I was interviewing for an internship at the science program—” and you’ve lost their attention.

The men at the pizzeria chat in hushed Spanish and refer to you and your coworkers as skinny, stupid, and fat. You grind your teeth, vibrating with anger, as the man pulling a pizza out of the oven starts to describe how he accidentally hit you with the pizza paddle, how you are so, so clumsy, silly girl, but you cut him off.

“I told you yesterday that I speak Spanish,” you said.

From across the street, you can hear an argument unfold.

You see a beautiful, flowing dress being jerked and pushed by a stern dress shirt and tie. The couple’s footsteps sound like a frantic dance along the pavement, coming closer to you. The bracelets on her wrists sound like wind chimes when she rips her hand from his. His dress shoes circle her. Her scarf flies in the breeze as

she spins out from his grip.

His glasses turn downward when she leaves, only a trace of honeysuckle perfume left in his nose.

Before he pivots to nurse his ego, you wish you could tell him, scream at the top of your lungs:

“Her trust is a gift.

her presence is not required.

Women are art,

let us speak for ourselves.”

You’re sitting in the back of your science classes— “Really? You’re a science major?!” Yes, really— in class, the boys scoff when you try to join the debate on social constructs. You glare at the backs of their heads. You’re so mad you could spit at them, but then you remember hearing, “Bro, women can’t spit,” while walking to class and your mouth turns dry. *Why is this insignificant memory crashing through your current thoughts?* You fight back the urge to shrink back in your seat, telling yourself that you will not let them decide what you can do.

You’re 19 and you always dress nicely for your job as a brick in a pyramid scheme, at an office that sells really expensive knives. Or rather, you play office, surrounded by college students, and your manager is a total bro. He’s 24 and a West Virginia gradu-

ate—or perpetual frat boy—who wears a snap-back hat every day that matches his tie, and he tends to favor you.

Since the manager has made you his pet, you often linger after meetings; you belong to the cool crowd at work. Safe enough, you think; this is a work place. Right? Wrong. One night on your way out, he groans something about how “all you girls dress like you just want me to stare at your asses” and pulls you onto him, causing you to reel backwards and excuse yourself.

You bite your tongue and you feel a bite back from deep in your belly, from the primordial beast buried deeply, that screams at you to never trust a man, run to your car, lock the doors, go home, go home, go home.

Your manager texts you a week later, asking you to return your sales kit.

—

Eve,

Never let anyone tell you that it was your fault or that you were asking for it. When they beat you down and scream at you to get up, just remember that the world doesn't move without you. You will be misunderstood, taken advantage of, laughed at, hurt, frustrated, and angry. They will be scared by your fiery passion for life, your innate sense of nurture, your powerful ways, and your fearlessness. Never let anyone lay a finger on your sacred skin without your permission. Never let anyone make you feel worthless, because you are everything.

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Currents

Stephanie Smith

You're an empty landscape,
Somehow more populated than I am.
But I have rivers and oceans
And sunrises.

My demands travel in currents.
You speak with your hands,
Reaching for goosebumped hills
Like a vulture circling a flatline surface.

Invitations sent through cracked lips.
Not enough spit to seal an envelope.
Unthinking words and
Gray-inked apathy.

Sure, I have ChapStick,
But not enough
For a desert.

Feather Fingers

Danielle Weidner

Never forget feeling like paper mache; like stacks of brittle balsa-wood, so thin you can slice slivers of sheets, weave it into a shawl, and drape it over your arms. In fact, never forget feeling so much like paper mache that you can't even feel your nerves pulsating in conjunction with the locomotive passing on your right. Better yet, never forget the feeling of Him carving out your ashen bones with an ice cream scooper; sanding down the hollowness and pouring in oxidized honey milked from the clouds—or that moment just before your knuckles buckled, before your soul shimmered through your airway, before your veins sprouted vines and your fingers became daisies.



MUD SLINGING SPLASHERS



DANIMATION
ART BY DANIEL R. HILTON

Mud-Slinging Splashers

Daniel R. Hilton

Blocked

Monica Archer

Letters flash in front of my eyes,
scrambled—
like a dyslexic
marquee,
advertising a show
that no one wants to
see.

Thoughts on the bottom of a lake
where patiently I cast my
line,
hoping for a bite,
but nothing feels like
mine.

Words doing the backstroke,
swimming through a
sea
riddled with confusion,
lacking comprehension,
never quite reaching
me.

Hands poised on the keyboard,

awaiting further
instruction,
not knowing that my
writer's block
will lead to my eventual
destruction.

Part of Me

Gilbert Moreno

The trout slaps the ground
An eye on them
With fish line sagging
From blood and fight.
His gaping mouth gasping
'Round the rusty hook
While they (they!) breathe in life.
Had he been spawned in
A vaster place,
Say, Galapagos Waters,
He'd not have a chance
Of knowing a slow death
In another's empty gullet.
But now he thought!
Oh, hasten this death
You—amused torturers!
Slice me open
Stitch my gills
My head chop quickly
Merciless monsters.
Let blood taint
River, and the sun
Reflect on discarded silvery scales,
So part of me remains

Part of flowing waters.



Gluttony

Mia Rico
pen and ink

A Teaspoon of Love

Caroline Nelson

The clock read 5am and Rose Braddock was hunched over a table in the bake shop. Pausing her sketch, she flicked a dried glob of buttercream icing off the order slip with her pencil and muttered to herself. The order was for a Mr. Andrew Brennan, who, without getting a chance to meet the baker, was picking up the cake the next day for his wedding. “A three-tier cake in fondant,” was all it said on the infuriatingly vague form. Rose found herself in the midst of sketching when the bell on the door rang.

Sam was working the counter that day, but Rose couldn’t help but look just in case. Jack came in. Okay, so she didn’t actually know what his name was, but he was the love of her life regardless and so she called him Jack to pay homage to her overly-romantic-Titanic-obsessed-teenage self. Only she knew that this relationship wasn’t star-crossed.

Their love was as fiery as a 350-degree oven, as strong as the motor of a kitchen-aid mixer on full speed, and as sweet as Rose’s raspberry cheese danishes. And Rose knew that one day, through bites of fresh baguette, Jack would finally look up and see her for the first time. Figuratively and literally. It was seriously only a matter of days, since lately he seemed to be coming to the bakery more and more often. She figured it was to see her.

She turned back to the bake shop, being careful to strategically position herself in front of the door so he could see her. She decided to start the bread for the day. That way she had an excuse to stand on that side of the room.

Jack walked in and gave her a smirk. He leaned on the table casually, meeting eyes with Rose. He traced his fingers in the flour on the table and reached up to playfully smudge it on her nose. Jack lowered his hands to meet hers. She stopped kneading the dough and he held her fingers loosely. It was like that scene from Ghost when they seductively make pottery. Sure, maybe he didn't quite have the same biceps as Patrick Swayze, but come on. Does anyone?

The bell rang again, and like that, he was gone. Her heart deflated like a cooling soufflé. The moment had passed.

She greased a bowl and dropped the dough she had just made into it, ready to proof. She took the dough from last night out of the refrigerator and began weighing it and shaping it into twists and braids. The monotonous task lulled her into her own imagination.

He waited outside the bakery, holding a single rose. "A rose for my Rosie" he said as he pulled her into a romantic embrace. Hand on her lower back, she felt her subconscious blush deeper than the flower.

"Rose what the focaccia are you doing?" Sam interrupted her as she walked back into the kitchen. Rose had been doing nothing but poking holes in the dough with her fingers.

"See ya later, cookie."

At three in the afternoon Rose had baked, iced, and covered all three tiers for the cake. The only thing that remained was the painstaking process of making the fondant flowers for the top tier.

She knew it would take hours and she could already feel the pain in the fingers just thinking about it. Sam was mixing a batch of pumpkin muffins while rapping to “Magic” on the other side of the room.

Rose kneaded the fondant, wondering if she should casually mention Jack. Sam might know something about him or be able to help her. Then again, Sam could be pretty unreliable, and asking could just be a recipe for disaster. She opted instead for:

“Sam...” she stopped rapping. “I really don’t think we should put a cream cheese frosting on top of the muffins. I mean I feel like that’s so expected, so boring. We should try a filling instead, with streusel on top. I feel like that’s more surprising for the customer.”

“What type of filling did you have in mind?”

Something sweet that leaves your heart wanting more.

“I don’t know...” Rose’s voice dropped off, “maybe a ganache?”

Then they were quiet.

She had soon made it past 30 flowers, focused intently on the process. Roll a bit of fondant into her hand. Flatten into the shape of a petal. Wrap the petal around the rest of the flower. Curl the edges to give it a lifelike appearance. Her hands were stained with red food dye, giving it the appearance that her heart was soaking out through her skin, and her fingertips were numb from flattening petals. She had 5 more flowers when she found her technique and presence of mind slipping.

“Rose don’t you know I love you? Don’t you know how much I’ve loved you?” It was clearly hard for him to say this. He was so overcome with emotion, he’d loved her secretly for so long, but now they could be happy together. “You are the icing on the cake, Rosie.”

A wave of disgust in herself pulled her out of the fantasy. She couldn’t help but think how she barely knew Jack. But he was funny, and attractive, and he made her laugh. He HAD to be flirting with her. Why else would he make unwavering eye contact with her while ordering blackberry scones? Could he be any more direct? She let out a sigh, put the last roses on the cake before putting it away for tomorrow, then scraped the fondant off her hands.

At the end of the day her heart was biscotti: twice baked and brittle. Her infatuation left a melancholic impression on her emotions.

The next morning she woke up earlier than usual. The wedding cake she had been working on would be collected early that day. She put special effort into it because this time she had imagined it to be her own.

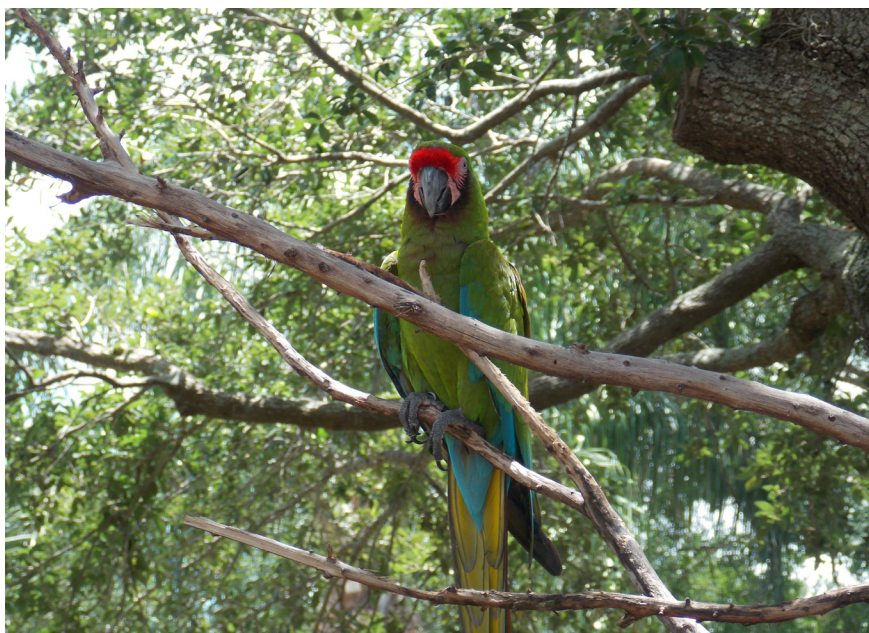
“Rose, I want to ‘turnover’ a new leaf. Together. Sweetie-pie, will you—“

The doorbell.

It was Jack! He was here to profess his love for her! She was sure. She imagined coffee dates and kisses, and—

Wait. Why did he just say his name was Andrew Brennen?

If that was his name. Then that meant... he was picking up the wedding cake.



Bird in Paradise

Babee Garcia
photography



Washington

Emily K. DeCaro
acrylic paint

Snowflakes down the Alleyway

Jason Barsanti

A place in the wintry veil
Aorta a white road with hail
Air of wight and gastric gale
My car swerves in the sleet
I crash on a dark snowy street
Place upon my coffin flowers of roses and crops of wheat
The bouquet of the bandit
Not planned this,
Planted by accident to accent an arrhythmic attachment
Slipped between the eulogy and apology,
Probably to postulate the possibility of post-mortem posterity
Posthumous humor's hosting
Heartbreak as of late here
But blasphemous and Bacchus
I hear the footsteps clear,
Again of my dear with Neverland near

Wind rushed in
But breath rushed out
And
I was shown the door
As the sun shone some more

Doe-Eyed Complexity

Jessica Schwartz

She had an air of quiet solemnity
in the way that she smiled, but her eyes were pensive.
She was within the world of herself, yet she absorbed all that went
on around her—
words, emotions, sounds, sights,
bound by the time of the present.

Her person was curtailed to simplicity when an abundance lay
inside,
trying to figure out how other people were pieces to a larger game.
Her heart consumed with melodies of another time
and the subdued acceptance of things that were not within her
control.

An observing glance around, taking in but not putting out—
listening, observing, thinking, questioning; always.
Requiring nothing but usage of open mind and language,
she was one with what was.

She was surrounded but unaccompanied in her ways.
She was firmly skeptical in what would remain,
in what was the truth,
but being one in her head was company enough.

She was made up of words and what she gave,

too mature for her own good but graced with a child's face.
A faded polaroid of reliability and discretion,
she was a contradiction of what was and what was thought.
She had a transparent expanse of gravity hidden behind her eyes,
of questions and concepts,
glimpsed at by few yet catching glimpses of beauty.

Shadowed sapphires of sadness,
polished nightly with the exercise of a frustrated mind.
She could not make sense of all around her, for full comprehension
was too great.
When she laughed, a transient light would illuminate them.

In an attempt to put the correct pieces together,
she herself realized there were too many.
Her person had dulled and dullness she faced.
She was one bursting with what she was, yet remained interned.
The air remained thoughts and the breeze remained whispers.



Make NK Great Again

Daniel R. Hilton

Sweet but Rotten

Colleen Calello

When I was little, I used to tear the wings off flies. It wasn't because I liked to watch the nasty little shits suffer. I just did it. It took a lot more work than expected. You can't use the dead ones that pile up between the window screen and the glass; you have to catch them fresh. That was the best way. I would put some mushy fruit that no one would miss but the flies would devour outside. Sweet but rotten. I would wait out in the blazing sun and eventually they would come; buzzing and helpless. Swiftly but carefully, I'd press my pointer finger down onto the fly body. A lot of the time I would miss and end up with a sticky finger and disappointment. Other times, I would feel the small hard body of the fly underneath my fingertip. I never tore the wings off right away. I would watch the tiny buzzing fly twitch under my finger—the power to crush its small body just a small movement away. I'd pinch a wing between my pointer finger and my thumb and softly tug till it came off. I would do this with each tiny sheer wing, flicking it off my thumb with indifference. I never killed the flies afterward; I let them die on their own, slowly crawling to their death.

“Maria. Maria. Earth to Maria.” My eyes snapped away from the buzzing flies surrounding the potato salad on the plastic table and turned to Andy.

“Sorry. What?”

“Aunt Sally was just saying how excited she is to see you all in white.”

“You’ll look absolutely splendid, dear,” Andy’s old aunt said.

“Yeah. As long as you don’t spill any of that red wine on me that you seem to be so fond of.”

“Maria.” My fiancé stared at me reprovngly, a slight blush creeping up his neck in honor of my rudeness.

“What?”

“So sorry Aunt Sally. It’s all the wedding plans. Maria, let’s go get more potato salad.”

“Sure.” I followed Andy over to the buffet table, tracing the flies with my eyes. The wedding was in only three weeks. September fourth. The honeymoon was going to be in Hawaii. Andy always said Hawaii had everything a honeymoon needed, clear skies, clear waters, and clear minds. He began planning this trip a week after he proposed at his parent’s vow renewal in the Poconos. I, however, still hadn’t taken off from work, and the manager needed three weeks’ notice.

“What was that about? I thought you loved Aunt Sally?”

“She’s sweet. Listen, we need to talk.” Andy grabbed for my hand like the suckling flies of my childhood.

“Anytime, hon. But can’t it wait till after the party? You only turn thirty once and get thrown a party by your mom.”

“It needs to be now.”

“Alright, what is it?” Cradling Andy’s hands in my own, I began to break his heart over the stench of warm potato salad festering in the sun for just a moment too long.

“Andy, this isn’t. . . .” Andy’s mom, Cheryl, chose that moment to bring out the chocolate cake. Cheryl’s face lit up in the light of thirty blazing birthday candles as she screeched that it was dessert time.

“Gather round the table, you love birds. It’s time to sing ‘Happy Birthday,’” said Cheryl.

Andy tugged me over to the head of the picnic table and held me close to his side as the family stared up at us with adoring eyes, singing “Happy Birthday” on an off pitch. He blew all thirty candles out in one breath. I don’t know if I was moved by the spectacle or just too far gone, but as he straightened up and sent out his birthday wish, I turned his head toward me and kissed him deeply and sweetly. Uncle Jerry let loose a cat call and we separated as strings of saliva connected our lips and his family cheered. I looked down shyly, watching a fly land on the large bowl of fruit salad. It was sweet.

The cake was chocolate with chocolate icing, and a strawberry filling. Andy’s favorite. I preferred vanilla. The family ate, talking quietly with each other. Cheryl and I discussed wedding plans. Did I want to stick with the red velvet cake? Andy really did love chocolate, she argued. And it really would be more traditional if my father walked me down the aisle, she probed, not my brother, Harry.

“Oh, honey, there’s a fly on your cup.” Cheryl reached over and flicked the rim of the plastic red cup, spilling the sickly sweet punch across the table.

“Andy. We need to talk.” He looked up from his conversation with Aunt Sally and held up a finger, indicating for me to wait.

I walked over to the drink cooler, grabbed an ice cube, and waited for the burning cold ice to melt in my warm hand.

“What are you doing?” Andy said as he approached me a little while later.

“It feels refreshing. So, back to where we left off. I was telling you something.”

“Yeah?”

I gathered Andy’s hands in my own just a little too tight.

“This isn’t working.”

“What isn’t? Your phone? I thought you got that fixed.”

“No, this,” I waved my hand between the two of us, “I’m not marrying you. I’m not even dating you. Forget it.” Andy took a step closer to me and grinned.

“Did Uncle Jerry put you up to this? That crazy old bastard!”

I smiled back at him. “I can’t marry you. If I have to live with you for a day longer, I’ll go nuts. I don’t need someone always apologizing for me. If I was sorry, I would say it. I don’t obey at the raise of a finger. I’m not a dog. And I definitely don’t need someone whose favorite band is Daughtry.”

“Maria, just take it easy. Tell me what’s really wrong. You can apologize for that later.”

“I said, Andy, that I am not marrying you. It’s been fun. The sex was pretty good. Here’s your ring back.” I dropped Andy’s hands, pulled the cheap ring off my finger, and politely held it out

for him. By this point, the tears were unwillingly showing themselves in the corner of his eyes. I could see him struggling as I pressed him further down. It was time to tear the wings off.

“You know I wasn’t sure about this until right now. Your insufferable family really made the decision for me. Now I know where you get it from.” I left him gaping at the water cooler and grabbed my purse from the picnic table.

“Leaving so soon, dear?” Aunt Sally asked.

“I have an appointment with the wedding florist! We’ll talk soon.” I leaned down and kissed Aunt Sally on the cheek, leaving the scent of sweet perfume in my wake. I walked toward the gate of the fenced in yard, waving at everyone as I left.

“Bitch!” I was wondering when Andy would turn from hurt too angry. I took no pleasure in his pain. I had really meant it when I said the sex was pretty good, I only faked an orgasm once a month. I kept walking toward the gate.

“Cunt!” He must be really angry. I was almost at the gate now. I was reaching for the latch when Andy became desperate.

“Maria, just wait. We can work this out. I’ll change my taste in music! You can still say sorry!”

I paused at the gate, listening to the family whisper. A fly landed on my upper arm and I slapped it away. I opened the latch and left the yard, leaving the buzzing of Andy’s family members behind me.



Family Portrait

Mia Rico
acrylic paint

Nature's Palette

Gilbert Moreno

Dead brown leaves, leaving
One hundred golden rings
And frozen amber rivers,
You glide by the strength
Of your pendulum
Onto awaiting pulsing pathways
Where we rush from here to there
With unconcern
For your lost majesty.

Yellow blighted leaves, you dangle
Like unwanted children
Caught in the skirts
Of my mother's willow.
You are the melancholy memory
Of a beauty that once lived.
We turn from you,
The pronouncement of death;
And no one hears your cries.

Scorched bloodied leaves, you hang
Like a painted portrait.
You are nature's second child,
But not the most beloved,

Yet you are admired
Against any colored sky
Dancing to a waltz
In Beethoven's arms.

Lush green leaves, you are
Nature's royalty.
We breathe your verdant life
And rollick in your shadows.
At your oaken tips, our
Mouths suckle your nectar—
it tastes of dead brown leaves.
You are prodigal with your
Gifts. We wait for you!

Woodchips

Monica K. Mills

When Pa drinks 'fore dawn
He say he chuggin' holy water.
Say the scent of booze
Sitting on August mist is
Nothin' but Peter pissin' on my head.

Pa say his water makes him pure,
—Saves him from hell.
But I know he lying
'Cause come dark
He be lying in the gutter
With his sin stained yellow on his
Workin' coat
And I gotta spur him home
With promise of fried plantain and boiled cabbage
For supper.

Pa's water ain't Judas though,
It ain't white or red
Nothin' sweet never broke fo' it
No grapes hung down cryin'
—So no one's gotta care.

The woodchips outside ain't Judas either

Even when they stain my hands
With mud pulp
And splinter the ice in Ma's lemonade.
Blurrin' the happy of sugar juice
Till it fades to the feel
Of gadflies landing on rum cake.

Lord knows I ain't Judas,
I ain't ever cared 'bout silver coins
But when Ma's got bruises
And Pa's been freshly baptized,
Stumbling 'round in the woodchips outside,
You'd sure as hell think I
Was 'bout to be.

Contributors' Notes

Christa Callamari is a junior minoring in Social Work and majoring in Child Advocacy and Policy. She loves coffee, books, and sunshine. Sherlock Holmes is her favorite fictional character, the original book version please! Psych is the only TV show she's ever watched start to end. If you can tell, she has a thing for mysteries. More than anything else, she hopes to one day move somewhere it never snows.

Caroline Nelson: "lightweight, anxious wreck, exceptional cuddler." - Her roommate

My name is **Brygida Dabek**. I am a Sustainability Sciences major and the Editor in Chief of the Environmental Club. If you found yourself relating to my piece, "Eve," just know that you are not alone. If you are struggling, hurting, and in need of support, we can talk. dabekb1@montclair.edu

Colleen Calello is a junior majoring in English. She works as a cashier at her local ShopRite but aspires to one day work in the publishing industry. Colleen spends a lot of time reading, watching movies, and scanning groceries. She has a love-hate relationship with her cat Scooby. She loves her mom and sister but above all else, Colleen loves her dogs Ozzy and Bowie.

Danielle, but goes by Dani, is a sophomore majoring in English and minoring in journalism. She has a deep fascination for people: their lives, what makes them tick, their stories, and more important, who they are as human beings. Which is why one day she hopes to travel the world for documentary channels like VICE. She wants to experience all walks of life and get them down on paper, video, and photographs for all to see. On the side, Dani would like to publish poetry and possibly a coming-of-age book. She enjoys photography, writing poetry, skateboarding, and just kicking it

back with her friends. She believes that friends are important and should be held close, because at one point or another they become family. Life is hard, but everything is an experience.

Lim, Kristy. Super Awesome and Creative (but also Pretty Nerdy)
Fall 2016 Biography. The Normal Review, 2016.

Alyssa Shugayev is in her senior year as an English major at Montclair State University. She has two dogs, enjoys reading above most things, and is a terrible dancer. She has watched every season of The L Word too many times to admit, will try anything mango-flavored, and prefers going to concerts and movies alone. She has an internship in Manhattan and aspires to have more of her poetry published some day.

Monica K. Mills is a sophomore who majors in English and Political Science. She loves to go on adventures.

Jessica Schwartz is an undeclared freshman at Montclair State University. In her spare time, she writes poetry, listens to alternative rock, and drinks a lot of green tea. She's overjoyed to be featured in this magazine and hopes to contribute again in the future. Thank you!

Frances McGrew is a senior at MSU majoring in English with a minor in creative writing and hopes to get a job in publishing or editing after she graduates. She dreams about the day where she'll be able to own a Bernese Mountain dog named Thor. In her spare time, she writes short stories, watches too many crime dramas, and eats lots of pizza.

Gil Moreno is a senior. He is an English major/creative writing minor. He has returned to school after many years and hopes to

be admitted to Rutgers' MLIS program. He is also considering an MFA in creative writing. And here's an idea: "Let's make the world great and not isolate ourselves, America!"

Anijeh Green is a junior English major with a minor in wishing she had her degree already. She hopes to become a marketing/advertising professional and ultimately plans on running her own non-profit organization for inner city youth. In the interim, she writes in the hopes of figuring out the world around her and the world within her.

Stephanie Smith writes short stories, but sometimes writes poetry to give herself an existential crisis. She's known as the woman who goes to parties for free food and the chance to meet people's dogs. Her mom says she has a perfect nose. Give her a call if you're into noses.

Monica is a sophomore English major. She is a four-eyed girl from a small hometown and she still can't believe it's not butter! A lover of music and procrastination, Monica knows every word to Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire." Her writing inspirations include Jane Austen, J.K. Rowling, and Tina Fey, among others. Monica is studying to become an English teacher and hopes people will one day know the difference between "you're" and "your"... she's never been very popular.

Jason Barsanti is a junior majoring in Psychology.

Babee Garcia is a sophomore at MSU, majoring in Journalism. She is Secretary of the Student Veterans Association, newscaster at WMSC, and staff writer for the Montclarion. She hopes to be Editor In Chief of a popular magazine or newspaper such as the New York Times. She agrees with Benjamin Franklin, as he once said, "Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

My name is *Elena Teixeira* and I'm 18 years old. I'm from Carteret, New Jersey, and I'm a freshman here. My major is Art Education and I want to be a famous artist one day.

Kyle Coan: A casual normie seeking pit to open up into another dimension. Give him no context or give him death!

Mia Rico is a sophomore studying animation/illustration who loves Disney, Studio Ghibli, videogames, and others. She also secretly minors in the art of puns. Rather than laugh, her friends sigh in disappointment at her wonderfully worded dad jokes. Despite this, she is still determined to change their opinions. She could say it is pretty LIT that she was chosen to be included in this semester's LITerature magazine. Now what OTTER you doing reading this bio? Go back to browsing the super awesome work in this magazine!

Masuma Begum: Did you know that Masuma means innocent? People who have met or know me have told me I'm anything but. I like puns and analogies, video games and tv shows, and the first piece of bread. My dream is to become a video game designer! Follow @masuart on Instagram if you wish to see more of my art!

Dominique Behrens is a freshman here at Montclair State University she hopes to major in psychology and minor in art. She was first acknowledged for her artistic ability when she started drawing on walls. Art has always been her therapy, and she couldn't imagine what the world would be like without it.

Emily De Caro is a freshman in Animation/Illustration who's looking forward to growing as an artist. One day, She wants to be able to tell fictional stories through visual art effectively, especially because she feels that she has some interesting ideas for characters and environments. For now, her main goal is to submit art out into the world and to take a more active role in the art community.

One of her biggest problems is she feels discouraged sometimes comparing their work to others, and it makes her feel unmotivated. She hopes that by participating more in the art world, both online and offline, she will gain the confidence to try more things and not doubt herself as much.

Notes

