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## The Normal Review, A Literary and Arts Publication, Fall 2018

The Normal Review

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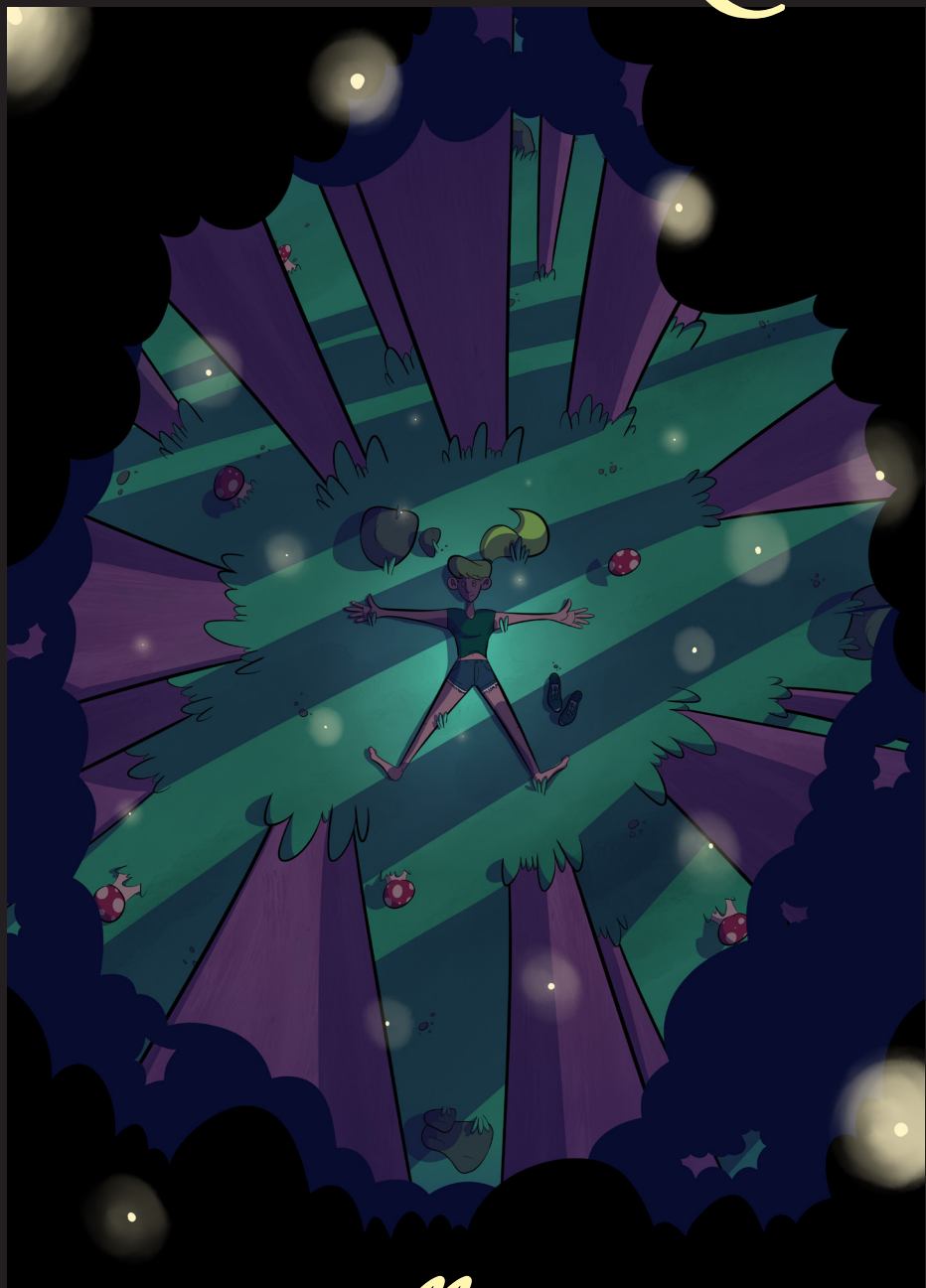
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# *The Normal Review*



*Fall 2018*



# *The Normal Review*

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A Literary and Arts Publication

*Montclair State University  
Fall 2018*

*Cover art: "Fireflies" by Josha Wescoat*

*Cover design by  
Valerie Jaretsky  
and Caroline Nelson*

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# *A Note from Our Editors:*

We are proud to belong to a rich history that dates back to 1926. From being part of *The Montclarion*, to founding *The Montclair Quarterly*, to making a name as *Four Walls*, the magazine has evolved into *The Normal Review* that you know today. We are thrilled to present to you the Fall 2018 issue of *The Normal Review*. Thank you for your submissions and support. We hope you enjoy!



# *How to Submit*

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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](http://thenormalreviewmsu.wordpress.com)

Questions, comments, concerns? Ask the editors.

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# *Theory*



Graphite on paper

Ben Kusik

And the spiders tiptoe through the magnificent ceiling cracks  
Weaving glorious spindles of crystal clear web  
Yet white to the touch  
Beady eyes ready to devour  
A hunger so strong that containing it would kill it  
And the darkness becomes my reality  
It fades from dull blue to effervescent black  
Anger spills from those glittering threads  
Red weeping and purple disgust  
My face feels tacky and my hands feel stiff  
I pull at my cheeks, feeling all is lost and I scream  
Skin litters the floor, blood dripping from the exposed cracks  
The angels are sobbing, this poor child  
What have they done to you now?

And alas I am awake  
The walls are white, my sheets are white  
The sky is white.

When I went  
To bed  
My walls  
Were blue.

# Golden Hour



Digital  
Mia Rico

# *THERE'S A FLY IN MY MOJITO*

*August 27th, 12:31 pm, Santa Maria, Cuba*

*\*WRITTEN ON A CRUMPLED NAPKIN\**

---

Yohan Rodriguez

Party on the beach last night has left my blood tainted alcohol infused. Sand in my bones and in the cracks of my muscles.

Today I sit under spinning fans and birds. Headache, self-conscious. Tender feelings of nostalgia fill my mind as I see couples pairing eyes and thoughts together, timely.

So, I remember her, beautiful porcelain figurine doll of eternal memory fixed in position. To speak through time as ripples in the streams of thought. A pebble splash as big as a stone's yet floats like a swan on the lake of my restless mind. I think in images and translate thoughts to words transfixed on napkin, tabula rasa. These are the commandments of my life, yet everlasting change has bred evolving mind.

So now I practice the translation of soul speak into something physical so to catch the ever-alluding muse in the warm hands of literature. Yet it is not contained but set a'floating in the immense sea. So, she speaks in riddles and sows the fields of thought with seed of passion.

The hymns of nature are expressed in the rhythm and dance of the cocoa trees and the splash, crash of ocean waves. the drum beat of the heart with metronome keeps everything in tempo and the breath is the conductor. Every living thing follows and has this similar characteristic.

On a magical mystery tour I once saw the breath of life vaporized like that of children on a snowy winter night when they stick their tongues out to catch a gentle snowflake and taste the mechanisms of nature remembered by waters liquid memory of life. If we could tap into the vast reservoir of knowledge retained by this liquid ink that pained the old poetos. We can see through the eyes of the universe and witness the eternal suffering dharmic wheel spin before our minds.



There's a fly in my mojito.

Patently awaiting sugar crystals to form after every sip and start the decomposing sutra they so require. The wooden table bares the carvings of my ink into this napkin, gentle folding medium, fragile as a sunflower from which tree in which wood has thou been stripped from in order for me to transpire the speech of my thoughts to pass down like the first homo-serafins did to their daughters.

*Editor's Choice*

It starts with the breeze flustering my wild hair  
and me wishing the music would go louder.  
My ears are filled to the brim with airless tunes  
and the oppressive sounds of old memories.  
But I'll dream of you tonight.  
Your spread of dappled freckles,  
your golden hair,  
your soft blue eyes,  
yes you'll be in the stars tonight  
as I wait for sleep to come.

You're the poem I've yet to compose,  
the headache I've yet to choke down with  
a long shower  
and hot cup of coffee,  
the careless calm that arrived  
a few minutes before the storm even ended,  
the song that plays just as the credits  
start rolling.  
You're the love that's yet  
to break my heart.

# *Ode to the passage of*

---

Ashley Altieri

Flower buds and robin eggs,  
man on bench with  
crinkled news

Lullaby book and ostreoida,  
woman solemn in  
the waiting room

Grandfather clocks and wooden brooms,  
lonely kettle on  
the stovetop,  
like honey dripping from a spoon—

I sit  
and wait

# *Take a (Sea) It*



Photography  
Valerie Jaretsky

INT. GRANT HOUSE HALLWAY-- NIGHT

The hallway is tight; faux-chic designer wallpaper wraps the halls. Neatly hung portraits of a couple in their late 20s hang on the walls:

Lying together in the grass in Central Park.

At a family birthday party.

In the city.

Leading down the hallway hang strands of tacky gold and silver reflective plastic Christmas garland.

The garland leads down to a closed door residing at the far end of the hallway, light bleeding through from underneath. Indistinct shouting can be faintly heard behind the closed door.

There's more than one voice.

There's two--

A man and a woman.

The doorknob rattles. The door is thrown open.

JESS, crying, the same girl from the portraits on the walls stands there, turned toward someone inside the room, hidden behind the door frame.

MARK (O.S.) Oh fuck off!

JESS shuts the door behind her.

THUD.

The whole house almost shakes. She storms down the hall, the golden garland trembles as she runs by.

She heads down the stairs and into the kitchen. An opened bottle and two champagne-stained glasses rest on the counter top.

Jess, still sobbing, makes her way through the dining room. A silver banner reading “Happy New Year! 2017!” is Scotch-taped up on the wall.

From the dining room into the living room, dozens of Christmas cards are tacked onto the threshold between the two rooms.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2.

In the living room a beautiful fully decorated Christmas tree sits in the corner, next to a TV, airing the crowds in Times Square waiting for the ball to drop.

Jess takes her winter coat off the hanger and grabs her car keys and purse from the coffee table.

TV HOST In just a few minutes the--

She opens the front door, turns back to look upstairs for a moment, wipes her tears, and steps into the black outside, as wind and huge wisps of snow howls by.

THUD.

The Christmas wreath is rattled by the slamming door.

Heard outside, a car door opening and closing is quickly followed by the sound of the car revving to life.

EXT. GRANT HOME. ONE YEAR LATER.

It's pitch black. There are no Christmas lights. There is no snow. There is no Christmas wreath on the door. But it's winter because everything outside is still frozen, draped in a blanket of snow.

INT. GRANT HOUSE. CONT.

MARK, wearing pajama pants and a stained white T-shirt sits in the living room. His hair is longer than what we saw in the hallway pictures. He has a beard in development and just generally looks like shit.

It isn't as cozy as we last saw it.

No tree.

No hanging cards.

No decorations.

The TV is on again though. This time it's playing an infomercial for a new blender.

INFOMERCIAL HOST Once again, if you call now, we'll give you the new years offer-

He turns off the TV and gets up from the couch, clutching a cheap, plastic bottle of vodka.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3.

Several empty pizza boxes lie on the couch, next to crumpled tissues and fast-food bags.

In the dining room, the table is covered in garbage and cardboard boxers. There is no "NEW YEARS" banner.

The kitchen is a mess, a sink overflowing with dirty dishes, a counter covered in dozens of holiday colored envelopes, and a half a dozen bottles of booze ranging in amounts of liquor left.

He finishes up his bottle, grabs another bottle and takes a shot glass.

He heads upstairs, down the hallway, past the portraits. He opens the door at the end of the hall and closes it behind him.

CONT. INT. MARK'S BEDROOM

Needless to say, the condition of his bedroom isn't much better than the rest of the house. He sits down on the bed and longingly glances at a worn yellow prayer card taped to a bed side wall mirror, the side of the card facing him reads:

*JESSICA GRANT April 11, 1986- January 1, 2017*

along with a beautiful portrait of her smiling.

The radio is playing. A song comes to an end.

RADIO DJ (V.O.) All right everyone! We've got one last song for 2017! Hope everyone had a great year and we're counting down the minutes to 2018 here on WC-

Mark pushes the radio off the nightstand. It hits the ground and stops playing.

Mark reaches for a small pill bottle of antidepressants from the night stand.

He takes one.

He fills his shot glass and downs three pills, followed immediately by the shot.

He grimaces.

4.

Puts the bottle and shot glass down, collapses in bed and closes his eyes.

INT. MARKS ROOM

THUD.

Mark jumps up in bed.

He rubs his head.

He looks around the room, confused. It's clean. There is no shot glass. No pill bottle. He turns to face the mirror. There is no prayer card. No beard. No long hair.

He whips his head to face the closed bedroom door. On the other side he hears the hurried sound of high heels clacking down stairs.

INT. MARKS ROOM

Mark jumps up in bed.

He rubs his head.

He looks around the room. It's a mess again. Shot glass, pills, beard, hair, prayer card, it's all back.



He rubs his forehead, picks up the bottle of vodka, squints to read the label. Shrugs and pours himself another shot and lies back down.

INT. MARKS ROOM

THUD.

Mark jumps up in bed.

Mark looks around. It's back to the clean room.

He turns towards the door.

CLICK CLACK CLICK

He jumps out of bed and heads towards the closed door, just as he opens it--

5.

INT. MARKS ROOM

Mark jumps up in bed.

Mark looks around, baffled.

Dirty room.

Grabs the vodka, another shot.

Lays down.

INT. MARKS ROOM

THUD.

Clean room.

Marks gets up from bed. Now he's a bit wobbly.

He trips over himself and falls into his wall mirror.

CRACK.

He stands up. Looking into the newly shattered mirror, a cut has opened up on his forehead he goes to touch it, then-

CLICK CLACK CLICK

He rushes to the door, swings it open, starts to make his way down the hall, more like stumble there just as he gets to the top of the stairs--

INT. MARKS ROOM

Dirty Room.

Mark looks around. The mirror's cracked now. There's a healed scar on his forehead. He fumbles for the vodka bottle and pours himself three shots.

Lies down.

INT. MARKS ROOM

THUD.

Clean room. Marks crawls out of bed.

CLICK CLACK

He makes it to his feet, opens the door. Mark tediously makes his way down the hallway, all the way to the top of the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 6.

Down the stairs we hear the front door slams shut.

THUDD.

He groans. He tries descending the first few steps but sighs and throws himself down the stairs. His body collapses at the bottom. He looks around at the kitchen. Clean. Bottle of champagne, and glasses on the table.

INT. MARKS ROOM

Dirty Room.

Mark looks visibly sick.

Another few shots.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM

THUD.

Mark falls out of bed onto the floor, he crawls his way to the door and it creaks open.

CLICK CLACK

He goes to open his mouth but can't manage to strength to talk.

He crawls down the hall.

Front door closes.

THUDD.

He throws himself down the stairs again.

Desperately, on the floor he crawls his way through the kitchen, into the dining room with the “Happy New Years 2017!” Banner.

Into the living room under the arch of Christmas cards.

The TV is on. Times Square Ball Drop.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS 10! 9! 8!

Mark scrambles toward the door.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) 7! 6!

He’s made it to the closed front door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 7.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) 5! 4!

He grasps for the door knob.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) 3! 2!

He turns the knob.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) 1!

The door opens. Cold air and snow rush in. Mark’s eyes close and he completely crumbles in the freezing, open doorway.

Motionless.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) Happy 2018 everyone!

Outside the sound of car door opening, closing and the car starting are heard again.

TV HOST AND CROWD OF THOUSANDS (CONT.) I hope you all were able to spend the night with people you care about even if it was just that special someone--

The car is heard faintly through the wind pulling away.  
Mark lies there. Lifeless.

the smell of incense clings to me  
like a lover's perfume  
when I crawl from the basement  
drowned in the smoke of  
sandalwood

I want you to ask me  
where I've been  
when I get in your car  
with the talk-radio  
and the split-open seat

it's hot outside  
but I can still feel the  
basement's darkness  
woven into my drooping camisole  
like air-conditioning pressed  
between the pages  
of a library book

can you understand  
the language that  
speaks in static  
or do you just like  
knowing that someone  
is there

*Editor's Choice*

*perch*



Photography

Ben Kusik

# *Pastel Daydreaming*



Photography/Photoshop

Kristy Lim

## *St. Croix, Summer 1998*

---

Jess Petronzi

I see an ethereal view of the plains abundant with sheer shrubbery after a rejuvenating morning hike before the sun has risen. The water appears to be still as it infinitely extends into the distance. It is a cool morning. The clouds are passing by slowly as a cool breeze brushes across the plains. It is quiet. I begin to reminisce about my early expeditions... I remember that beautiful tree of the tropics with bright red buds emerging from green leaves. I remember the beach walked upon last night. I can hear the waves gently crashing on the shore. Then, I return. Looking at the view again. The colors in the clouds are dispersing among the sky. It is time for me to disperse as well. To float and wisp my footprints to my next destination.



# *While Night Comes*

---

Heading north  
I make haste with reason,  
For if ole massa catches me  
My life will be done.  
He'll tie me, he'll whup me,  
He'll chop off my leg.  
And I, a vexed mule,  
For mercy won't beg.

I'm gonna drag myself to freedom  
If that's what it takes.  
I'm gonna follow that sweet drinking gourd  
At nights without breaks.  
And when the white morning  
Descends on poor me,  
I will trust in God's mercy  
To shroud me from my enemies.

As I steal away softly  
Into the alluring night,  
I hear them white folks praying  
But their sinful hearts ain't contrite.  
They keep black brothers in bondage.  
They fatten up on black blood and tears.  
So when they sing their shallow hallelujahs,  
It's like mosquitoes murmuring in God's ears.

*after Langston Hughes*

---

Nubia Lumumba

Someday soon, I will be reposed  
In that there place yonder,  
Where the souls of black folks  
Will never be put asunder.  
And all whom the good Lord  
Loves decidedly,  
Will live free like intrepid winds  
Forging our own destiny.

I long to-pling my arms wide  
And embrace my black sons.  
To whirl and to dance  
With sunlight dripping down...  
Then rest at cool evening  
With sweet cup of tea,  
While night comes on gently  
Dark like me.

We will-pling our arms wide  
Giving grace for what's sown.  
We'll dance and we'll frolic  
When the white day is dethroned.  
Then rest at pale evening  
Beneath an oak tree  
While night comes in smoothly,  
Ebony!

# *I MUST confess?*

---

Monica Archer

This is a confessional poem

but what crimes have I committed?  
I have not pled  
guilty or  
innocent.

Maybe innocent by reason of insanity.

I am not under a lamp  
in a windowless room.  
No officers are grilling me.  
I have nothing to hide  
yet nothing to tell.

This is a confessional poem

but what are my sins?  
I don't tell those to  
just anyone who  
asks.

I am not on my knees  
in a reverential box.  
There is no screen  
with a priest on the other side.  
I am not being  
forgiven.

This is a confessional poem.

But why?  
Because I use the  
word  
I?

All this is  
is my pen, my paper,  
me,  
and you.

And I ain't tellin' you nothin'.

Dr. Mahzeb stood on the observation deck, his sweaty hands gripping the railing. He knew the massive red giant was too far away to pull him into its constant fusion, but he imagined he could feel the gravitational dent in space/time grasping at his body, dragging him downward. The view wasn't forward out the thirty-millimeter thick plastiglas, it was down. Mahzeb was standing on the edge of a skyscraper so tall the elevator would take a year to get to the lobby. He wiped his hand on his shirt and grasped back to his lifeline. He could look away, in theory, but not everything holds according to theory.

A coronal ejection seventy times the size of the earth spat out into space from the surface of the star and plummeted back along an invisible ribbon of a magnetic field. All it would take would be one eruption a little bit stronger than that in the right direction to rip loose of the star and fry the entire station. Mahzeb tried not to think about it. Worse was coming. The consequence of what he had to do was weighing on him almost heavily enough to balance out the gravity threatening to drag him into Zotzilaha B.

Liu and Taylor joined him on the deck. Liu tried to smile but held herself back, probably in an attempt to not appear serious in the face of their monumental task. Taylor looked smug. Mahzeb knew he couldn't help it: he always looked like he had just ratted out the shy kid in class for smuggling his pet rabbit to school in his backpack in exchange for extra pudding at lunch.

"Dr. Mahzeb, we're ready to begin our pre-experiment checklist. The team is ready and waiting," Taylor said, brimming with pride.

"There's no rush," Dr. Liu hastily added.

Mahzeb turned toward them, keeping one hand on the bar and returning the other as quickly as he could. His back to the red giant was somehow even worse. As if it was looking over his shoulder, listening to what he would say next.

"I know. Thank you. Dr. Liu, Dr. Taylor. How's the payload?"

“Loaded onto the missile, trajectory mapped and locked, ready to fire at your command.”

“Good. It won’t be too unstable out of containment if we delay?”

“No. It should keep, but it’s a risk. We shouldn’t wait too long. It’s a miracle that we can forge the element and keep it stable for any length of time at all. The less we gamble the more accurately we can predict the results,” said Taylor. Mahzeb thought of his respect for Taylor, despite the frequency of their disagreements and that he would like to work with him again should they survive the experiment.

“Still having doubts, sir?” Liu and Mahzeb had known each other for 16 years; the “sir” was entirely unnecessary. They had gone to grad school together so long ago. So far away...

“Sir?”

“It’s all just a guess, isn’t it? We don’t know what this payload will do, how close it will come to the core, if it will react the way we want it to, and then even if it does work... my god.”

“We need to do this, Dr. Mahzeb. If this works and all the equipment Earth and the Mars colony have been constructing for years finally arrives, humanity can move forward on the civilization scale.”

“But at what cost? Should we be the ones responsible for the death of a star?”

Liu and Taylor were silent. They knew Mahzeb in his moments of doubt. His scientific mind would prevail. The remnants of superstition didn’t control him.

“Maybe we’re not ready. What if humanity takes this step and it destroys us? We can barely harness the technology we already have.”

“Progress always has casualties. We’ll save more than we’ll lose,” said Liu quietly.

“We’ll lose stars. This giant light in the sky has burned for millions and millions of years. Who are we to snuff it out? For what? To take a joy ride?”

“It’s so much more than that, Cal,” Liu never called him by his full first name, much less his nickname. “We’ll be able to transverse the universe, to explore, to colonize, to learn. What if we finally meet another intelligent race? Isn’t that worth one star that was going to be extinguished anyway?”

“Maybe, Liu, maybe. I’m just not comfortable being the first person to kill a star. It doesn’t deserve to die like this.”

“Sir, Zotzilaha B was chosen for its likelihood to go supern--”

“I know the reasoning, Taylor. Thank you.” Mahzeb finally found his footing without the railing. He turned back toward the star that hung silently behind them. “I’m so small. How can I destroy a star?”

“You’re not. We are. We’re just as culpable.” Taylor tried to wrestle some credit for himself.

“You’re not destroying. You’re creating. A black hole was probably going to form anyway, you’re just going to nudge it along.” Liu had already won a Nobel for the research that put them all on the shuttles out to this station. What accolades waited for her, and all of them, on their return?

“I never thought I would be an executioner.”

“Sir, we shouldn’t wait any longer. You know what has to be done. Just do it. Pull the trigger and get it over with.”

“Get it over with?” Mahzeb laughed, “I wonder what our ancestors would think. Here we are on the edge of known space, preparing to launch a new element into the heart of a star hoping to jump-start a black hole so we can go through it to the other side of the universe. And they used to think the stars were holes in a blanket.”

“It’s important to keep perspective, Cal. No one takes your deliberation as weakness. It would be irresponsible and inhuman not to consider the impact. But we have the data. We’ve done years of projections.” Liu placed a comforting hand on his arm. “This is going to work.”

“We’re going to live forever in history.” said Taylor, not out of

narcissism, but with the pride of a parent genuinely grateful for the accomplishments of their child.

Maybe they were right. Their course was set. The time to back out was before he strapped into the shuttle three years ago.

“Okay. Let’s do this. Thank you. Both of you. I’ll see you on the bridge in one minute.”

Taylor and Liu hesitated, worried that Mahzeb had placated them to gain more time staring out the window, but each saw in their friend and leader a resolved spirit. They left him at the window, standing with perfect posture, away from the rail.

Mahzeb looked at Zotzilaha, trying to see it as a being with consciousness, and then tried again to see it as a reactor, without thought, floating mindlessly through space. Neither aspect felt accurate. Mahzeb placed his hand on the window.

“I’m sorry.”

Bear with me for a second  
while I spill my rotted guts out.

It all started yesterday  
when I woke up.

From there everything was  
pretty much downhill

and now my head's jammed  
between my legs

and I'm crouched on the curb  
trying to get the ground to stop spinning.

Pursed lips  
and a pocket full of gum wrappers,

but my mouth isn't tired  
and my breath still tastes stale.

Three shots of whiskey  
and I hit the ground running,

four and I crash down  
the door to the bar,

five and I kick open the door  
to your apartment,



six and I'm dangling thirty feet above the pool  
hanging onto your balcony rail by my five fingers,

seven and I'm running like hell  
from your very big, very strong boyfriend,

eight and I'm sitting in the bar  
with a headache,

nine and my eye turns  
from yellow to purple to black,

ten and I'm puking up those rotted guts  
all over the sidewalk outside.

# *Restraint*



Graphite on paper

Ben Kusik

look at me. now look at the  
subway tracks. now look at me,  
then look back at the subway  
tracks. the train is coming, look  
at me. i'm on the train, now  
look behind you. i am actually  
not on the train. there are no  
subway tracks and there is no  
train. why? because the PATH  
is suspended and i just ran to  
the ferry in the pouring rain.  
now look back at the subway  
tracks. goodbye

# *Parking Lot Romance*

---

Sierra Javras

I dance across the pavement with the tails of my skirt  
bunched in my fingers.

Stencil me into your fantasies and  
I'll color you into my daydreams.

And oh how your wicked eyes make me terribly weak  
as the music drifts softly from the half open door

where just inside the walls are glassy, the air is smoky,  
the ceiling is gone, and the floor is caving in.

But right now I'm just a little dizzy as you gallantly  
extend your arms to catch my spinning body.

God, your laughter is so contagious.  
I hurl myself into you

and we float to the ground like a thundercloud,  
grass in your hair and fistfuls in my hands.

When I shut my eyes against the world  
I can hear your steady heartbeat

and it makes me think of when we shared a slice of pizza  
on a cold New York City street corner

while the rest of the world continued unaware  
under the light drizzle.

That was when the first winter snowflake  
melted on your nose.

# *The Aesthetic of My Existence*

---

Kelsey Claesson

When people learn my name,  
they do not laugh or mock or cringe in distaste.

When I am pulled over,  
I am not nervous.

I bat my eyes and twirl my hair,  
earning a chuckle and a “just be on your way.”

When I walk down the street,  
I am not heckled, nor sneered at,  
nor spit upon by the bitter mouths of those that think  
they are so much better than me.

I am constantly surrounded by people that are  
just like me:

similar features,  
cultures,  
families,  
and thoughts.

I am surrounded by people  
who think this is okay.

I am surrounded by people  
who think this is right.

I am surrounded by people  
whose poisonous thoughts roll off their tongues  
with the ease and vigor of waves crashing along the shore.

I am surrounded by people  
who receive prosperity and praise for their wrongdoings.

People who belittle

a person,  
a race,  
a religion,  
a culture.

Who make them feel as if they are  
an accidental splatter of paint on a  
larger, more complex work of art.  
But what they do not realize, is that  
that small splatter makes a world of difference;  
the painting would not look anywhere near the same without it.  
My aesthetic of existence  
brings me no fear, no anger,  
no anxiety, no shame.  
Just as I wish yours did not either.

# *Autumnal Sun*



Photography/Photoshop

Kristy Lim

Garrett Scott should be sent to a sanitorium. I have requested his detainment multiple times and received no reply from the municipality, the local law enforcement, or from my neighbors—whom I have asked with great enthusiasm and patience, to sign a compliance letter to demonstrate the solidarity among the residents of my street on this issue. Months ago, when Garrett’s rampage began, I thought that the problem was minor, and that the mechanisms of the local government, would ensure that the removal of Garrett Scott would require nothing more than a simple request—an operation comparable in size and severity to the removal of a bothersome boil from an otherwise healthy and pristine body.

That was four months ago, and I have received nothing. I can’t be the only one who thinks that his behavior lately has bordered on the insane and grotesque. Apparently, no one but me seems to mind that he’s actively destroying the social fabric of the neighborhood, not even Sheila Dahlenberg, who’s always walking by our house in the mornings with her purple fleece jacket and corresponding ear-muffs, waving happily to me all without breaking her stride. These were such accommodating folks, once.

My frustration has no end. Today, I’m standing up and taking action, and though I’m not sure how I can effectively do *anything* beyond sending more complaints to the same people and the same organizations until I manage to wear *someone* down, at least I’m doing something.

Garrett lives right next to me, and so his actions affect me the most. He “lives” in a dinky old house, with no one to keep him company except his dirty, ancient dog, which runs around the yard during the day, chasing birds, barking at cars, and licking its own genitalia. The house was once white but has since faded, after decades of desecration, into the crumbling, moldy gray of absolute disrepair and ruin. I can’t even imagine the interior, the stagnant air hanging in rooms over-crowded with dirty teacups and disintegrating garbage, all coated in a layer of dust so thick...

Garrett Scott has been digging a hole. First, upon looking out the window of my second-story bedroom and peering out on



his small, hunched-over figure on the grass, I thought he was trying to plant something. I thought that maybe Garrett Scott, in all his saggy uselessness, might be starting to fill up his days with something new. I have always had fantasies about living next to some old grandma with a lush garden full of every shape and color of flower imaginable, tended by some old bag with a floppy hat, smiling and inviting us over, me and my family that is, to come and pick fresh fruit or gaze at the blooming flowers. I want my kids to see the natural forms before the natural forms go away.

But Garrett has done no gardening whatsoever. He just putters into his backyard with a shovel, patting his dirty dog on the head as the pooch waddles close behind, and he clambers down into this big brown crater and stays there for hours. I don't know exactly how long he stays there, but he's inside the hole before I leave for work, and the lights of his house don't turn on until late into the night. I know he's down there, in the hole, because even when I'm walking out to my car, at seven on the morning, I can see swaths of dirt flying out of the entrance, no doubt propelled by Garrett's shovel from within the ground, and landing in a textured, growing pile of earth near the entrance.

"Is it a hobby?" I ask one morning, stopping by on my way to the car. I can barely make out his figure from where I stand—the hole extends at least ten or twelve feet diagonally down from where the gap in the lawn was originally torn. I can only see vague movement in the dark, even in the sunshine of the early morning, even with the LED bulb suspended from the roof of the cavern tube. He is so filthy and brown that all I can perceive is the plunging of the steel shovel into the ground, and the sound of heavy breathing.

"No," he says without turning.

"Are you trying to build a bomb shelter? Surely you can afford, with some of the money you have no doubt saved for retirement, to hire someone younger, a professional, to do all of this for you?"

"No, thank you though."

"Is something buried down there?"

"No, sir."

"Well then why? Why do all of this? It's very disrupting." At this, Garrett looks up and reveals his old, weathered face. His eyes peer out from behind leather skin caked with mud and sweat. His beard looks like the fuzzy root system of a potted plant ripped

prematurely from the soil.

Garrett looks up at me now, squinting for a few moments, catching his breath, “Don’t you have to go to work?” This catches me off guard. How could a man who spends his days digging in the yard like a dog ask me a question like that? Shouldn’t *he* be going to work?

“Yes, but I have a few moments and I thought I’d let you know that what you’re doing back here...whatever that may be... is both outrageous and disturbing and I’m formally asking you, right here and now to either explain yourself or to stop completely.”

“Well, my digging seems to really be annoying you doesn’t it?”

“Well, I’m just dumbfounded at the prospect. You must be eighty years old—no offense—and you spend all day digging. To what end? Don’t you have to stop to eat at least, or to sleep?”

“Nope.”

“Is this some kind of statement, some political thing?”

“No, sir”

“Well why are you digging then?” Garret stands up now, raising his body only as much as the earth above him permits. Wiping his forehead, he speaks with a pride and humility of a man who had finally found a purpose.

“I am digging to China.”

I have a family, or at least I used to. I used to have a plump European-looking wife, whom I had plump, European-looking children with. The boy, Jonah, had these freckled cheeks and baggy eyes, like an old man’s eyes, and he would totter around the house pretending he was a soldier of “The Galactic Fedewation” he would say, and smile a wide, toothy smile, missing baby teeth and all. The girl, Verona, was a little more withdrawn, always reading some book or playing with toys by herself, always looking at me expectantly with a forlorn dimpled expression that seemed to ask: *Is this really it?*

We used to be a family, but I’m not sure what we are anymore. My wife and I had disagreements, and she no longer lives with me. The kids too, with their cute little faces, have left me in this house all alone. It’s funny how the definition of excess changes when something like this happens. The world shrinks down to the exact size and proportion of your own experience. The coffee pot

is too large and makes too much coffee in the morning—I have to throw most of it out and watch it cascade down the drain. The rooms are too large without children running through them. The bed is too big with no wife sleeping beside me, no more breathing mass reading mystery novels and sneaking cigarettes out to the bathroom window when I pretend to have fallen asleep. The hallways are too quiet. Where they once whirred with the buzzing sound of infinite excitement on Sunday mornings, when I would make pancakes, they now extend in all directions away from me when I stand in a doorway, empty tunnels leading to more empty rooms. I used to be a thing which filled up a room when I walked into it. I was a father, with a plump wife and chubby children. I didn't care about our shortcomings: we were never perfect, no matter how much my memory distorts. But at least I was more than just a guy sitting in a room.

Now, there is only me and I am finite without them. I occupy finite spaces when I'm required to—I drive the car, I fill out forms and expense reports at a desk chair which is only big enough to support my exact dimensions. My body travels back and forth between work and home with no intervals and my greatest thoughts, from morning until night, are lost to memory, and all the while, Garrett digs his hole, travelling deeper into the earth beneath his house.

What is Garrett's crime? I know that what he's doing is criminal, but I can't articulate the ways in which his behavior is even worth a second thought. How does it violate something which ought not to be violated? I think that maybe, all my petitions and complaints have had no result because there is truly nothing to be done, nothing to report. No legislative body has found error. It is his yard, and I guess it is only his right to dig a hole if he wants to. My real problem with the hole is that I just don't understand why a person would do such a thing. Where does a hole like that lead to?

Of course, I say all this only now that I'm standing in his backyard in my pajamas with a flashlight. His house is dark and quiet behind me. When I lean over and point the ray of the bulb into the tunnel, the beam can't reach the bottom of the hole, and I see now that in the past months, the hole has widened to accommodate more head-room and that he has dug far deeper than I thought possible. Using the flashlight, I examine the opening of the hole more closely, only to find that beneath the grass, instead of

soil, is solid, pristine marble, with cascading steps which lead down the path. I look behind me and all around, looking for his figure, or for anyone really, to tell me in an angry tone what I need to hear. But after a few moments of feeling cold and guilty, no voice scolds me for wanting to go deeper. I shiver and start to head back.

I have not seen Garrett in three days. I look out the window and down on the entrance to the hole and I see no movement, not even the tossing back of the soil, or the pacing of the dog. The lights from the house have not turned on once in 72 hours. It's bothering me a lot that he's gone, especially since it's my birthday today, and it's the big "four-oh" and I have no one to spend it with. I have friends at work, but their company has become more of a nuisance than anything at this point. I work as a fracking engineer. Fracking engineers almost always have the worst sense of humor imaginable. I thought maybe I'd invite Garrett inside and talk about the hole. I didn't expect him to accept, considering how rude I was last time we talked, but even if he declined he might try and return the favor by inviting me to his yard and letting me see the progress.

At night, when the house is quiet I can hear the hole hum. The tube must vibrate, or otherwise have some machinery which drones on and on constantly. I look over at his yard incessantly, looking for movement, for any sign of the little man with the shovel and the optimistic smile. All I can see is the grass starting to grow, day by day, creeping from the edge of the entrance, back toward some imaginary middle. Closing him in.

I received a strange letter in the mail today. When I first opened the mailbox, I almost didn't see it—a small little crumpled thing which must have been hand delivered and shoved into the steel box without care. When I pulled the letter out I noticed that there was no name on the letter, but I knew who it was from immediately. Hastily I jogged back into the house holding the thin envelope eye level, examining it as if it were some ancient letter on a pedestal in some museum.

Garret has been missing for nearly two weeks. I would tell the police, or his family, but I wouldn't know what to tell them, as the grass in his yard has grown back over the hole at an incredible rate. The lawn appears normal now. I can only imagine the looks I might get if I called the police and reported him missing and

explained to them that he is lost in a tunnel beneath the earth  
somewhere, apparently digging to China. They might think I've gone  
insane.

When I get back in the house I climb up to my room and  
look out across Garrett's lawn, to see if there is some sign, some  
new entryway carved out of the newly grown grass, but unfortu-  
nately, I'm let down. The yard looks perfectly normal.

I place a finger in between the sealed flap of the envelope  
and peel back the paper until it flops open. At first it appears as  
if it might be empty, a vacant piece of discarded mail, perhaps an  
envelope which had been residing at the bottom of his mailbox for  
quite some time, placed there either by accident or by chance, but  
upon further inspection, I can see the contents hiding in the cor-  
ner of the pouch. I pull out from the envelope a scrap of paper no  
larger than a pinky finger—a thin piece of paper with a single line  
typed out onto it, the same kind of slips of paper found inside of  
fortune cookies. It reads: *The early bird gets the worm, but the second  
mouse gets the cheese.*

Standing in Garrett's lawn now, with a shovel, reminds me  
that I've remained inactive on this issue for too long, been to ne-  
glectful of my mentally challenged neighbor and that today, starting  
with rescuing him from the hole, I am going to start making a dif-  
ference. I pick up the spade and place it in the ground where I last  
remembered seeing the hole and I start to dig.

# *Definition of Beauty*

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Nubia Lumumba

The kidney stone is such a painful beauty,  
Shunned by all whose eclipsed eyes see ruin where there is glory.  
Its exterior, as ugly as a natterjack toad,  
Does not appease the critics' eyes.  
But if they should behold how marvelously the stone's crystal layers shine  
Like Paris when she slips into her iridescent evening gown,  
They would want to be enveloped by it!  
And sucked up by its intense gravitational pull—  
The way that dust joyously leaps into the tunnel of a Hoover vacuum cleaner.  
Why must beauty be so magnetic?  
When they ask you what it is, son—  
Tell them—tell them beauty is a woman with her legs spread wide open  
Ushering new life into the world;  
It's the sound of rain's hooves pounding on galvanized rooftops.  
And if they still do not understand,  
Then show them, son, so that they will believe!  
Take them out in nature and let them see beauty;  
Butterflies swimming against the wind in waves of green grass,  
Trees bending their boughs in prostration before the rising sun,  
And tornados like spoiled toddlers throwing tantrums,  
Leaving a heap of tattered floors, mama's mementos,  
And dad's spirited dreams on the ground.

# *Daydream*



Photography  
Alyssa Roberts

## **Red**

Inflamed. Raw. Poignant. It's the color of the shirt he wears on the first date and the color his cheeks turn when you tell him no boy has ever been so sweet. It's the color you see when he infuriates you to the point of utter frustration and the color of your heart when you remember all the reasons you love him. It's the color of the blood rushing through both of your veins in those heated, intimate moments of passion and the color of the fiery, stubborn attitude that irritates you so greatly.

## **Blue**

Serene. Unruffled. Tranquil. It's the color you notice his eyes are on the first date: the majestic and vibrant rolling waves of the ocean that resemble the ever-present stream of emotions he doesn't even bother trying to hide. It's the color that presents in stark contrast to those days when you are full of angst and frustration and he looks you in the eyes and rubs your arm and calms you down in an instant, letting you know that everything will be okay. It's the color of your first vacation together and his sweet murmurings at night right before bed.

## **Yellow**

Ecstasy. Delight. Bliss. It's the color of the moment in which he proposes and twirls you around in the air after you say yes and the color of the flashes from the cameras capturing the instance you'll someday tell your kids about. It's the color you see when the realtor presents the two of you the keys to your first house and the color you see when you host your first Thanksgiving together, seeing the masses of friends and family camped out around your living room and kitchen.



## **Purple**

Elegant. Divine. Forever. It's the color of both your birthstones and the month your wedding day is in. It's the moment you walk down the aisle in your white dress fit for a princess and lock eyes with the man of your dreams. It's the color you see when you say "I do" and commit to a lifetime of happily ever after because for this moment, and this moment alone, you're a princess and he's your prince. It's the color of the moment you find out you're pregnant and the surprised and exhilarated look on his face when he finds out he's going to be a dad.

## **Orange**

Fitful. Erratic. Unreliable. It's the color of your eldest crawling into bed with you in the middle of the night because the monsters won't leave him alone and the color of your newborn waking up crying. It's the color you see when your husband comes home late at night; clothes ruffled, hair unkempt, and spots of red smudged on his face like he tried to unsuccessfully wipe the lipstick off in hazard haste. It's the color of the moment when he looks you in the eyes and tells you he's sorry he had to work late and kisses you on the cheek before heading upstairs to go to bed.

## **Red**

Inflamed. Raw. Poignant. It's the color you see when he comes home drunk and reeks of perfume and you can't do anything but yell and scream and cry because you thought he loved you. It's the color you think about when you wonder why you weren't enough and why him and why you. It's the color of your kids crying faces that will haunt you for a lifetime when you tell them that Mommy and Daddy aren't going to be together any longer and it's the color of the bitter wine that swirls around and around in your glass late at night when you can't sleep because of your sour thoughts.

# *It's Not Raining But It's Wet*

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Alyssa Roberts

Rain. What a beautiful thing it is. The children dance under it, their feet sliding on the wet ground. Their hair wet with the sky's tears, but they don't care. What joy it is to be a child. So unaware. So innocent. So safe. It hasn't rained in two years exactly. It is as if the whole province has gone wild like animals. Water buckets, glasses, jars, bowls, cups, pans, pots, and pride litter the streets, yards, and any piece of landscape. Without the rain, we have water from lakes and ponds, but they have long dried-up, mucky dirt and grime, archaea and eubacteria, crawling around in the dried up algae, gasping for life. Just like us. The rain fell for eleven months straight. After three weeks, the village had all the water they needed and so much more. People no longer smelled of rotten meat and stale bread. Yet, if the people received all they had prayed for, why is it that three months later, they are sick and dying? We don't have the medicines for such ache, such cold, and wet weather. The swine flu took over and the whole of the town will never be as incomplete as it was then. Children, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts: seen yesterday, dead today. What a tragedy death is. Almost as doubtful as life, but at least you know they've gone to somewhere less painful. The sun rose and the rain hit a boiling point. It stopped on July 30, 1515. No one said anything that Friday. No cheers, screams, laughter: nothing. All the neighbors came out from mud brick houses and stone garden sheds and just stared at one another. Nothing more than a stare. No one ever thought the rain from hell would end, but it did and it left behind 300 of the 26,000 people living in the province. My mother, weak and frail, thinning at the bone mumbled something almost incompetent, "Dear God." And that is when I felt it, we ALL felt it. Rain.

# *Recycling Wood*

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Evan Dekens

Climbing ashtrays, my eyes parallel  
The works of ants who climb all day  
Who build mountains overnight  
Who devour trees like picnic sandwiches

Brick by brick, they combine centuries  
Still not enough time to pale the volume of trash  
The pile of whatever is left of my lunch—when it's dumped  
When the smokestack chugs its last tobacco puff

When I walk my feet land and lift like guarders  
Keeping old gum away from new mouths  
And when I eat I grow thinner and dryer  
Until my wardrobe is bleached and bound like ocean trash

Relegated to chairs, my best ideas are atrophied  
They cannot swim out of my ears or my tear ducts  
And join me at the table for breakfast  
And fill the room with infant morning breath

Even when I've stripped my limbs of their disguises  
They crawl from sewers to eat away my fingers  
To clean the snow of its acid salt and pink chemical  
To turn the world green again

Like ants building histories out of sand  
I dream that ocean trash will wash up on my doorstep  
So that my tiny arms can count the damage  
That I have done to every neighborhood I once loved

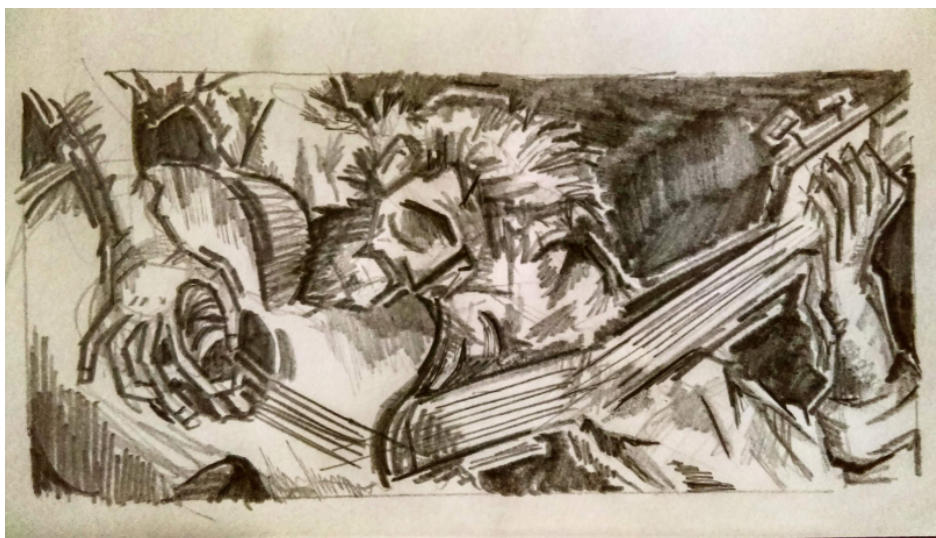
I have grown up inside empty rooms  
And watched ants construct my anecdotes  
Until they became what they are now,  
Attached: sedentary but not meditating

Their antennae poke out atop skeletal outfits  
Crawling where my ideas refuse to exit  
Growing fat on my history  
They devour roots of my shoes in moments

I have only this dusty beige room, which shrinks forever  
Forcing our shoulders to seek refuge  
Until we are too close to see each other  
Yet still sitting

On opposite sides of the room.

# *Lost in Vibration*



Graphite on paper

Mike Sano

# *The Conjuring*

---

Nubia Lumumba

My mother washes her sorrow with weeping  
Wishing daily for my dead daddy to return,  
To the warm fortress of her fleshy embrace  
Where time lingers while lovers' lips spill  
Dark secrets, untamed laughter, and sometimes  
Scourging words that scald the diaphanous soul.  
What wouldn't one do to conjure up a vivacious lover  
Whom this wanton jealous Life has gypped  
And departed ooh, too soon?  
My mother carves my father's name into the wind.  
She uses her slick tongue as a chisel to  
Gouge out each and every syllable of  
O-dys-se-us!  
When winds cannot mend man's scattered bones  
And give breath to his wandering phantom,  
A devoted son must feast on courage  
And make ready to wage war!  
Father, I will bravely follow you into that sunken place  
Where iron lions tussle with black-bellied beasts of Hades  
Never fearing the final death;  
For fire is the source of life within the inferno,  
And you, my conquering father, are the ferocious phoenix  
That will rise high from the purgatory ashes  
Wearing a fine garment of fire.

Put me in a ceiling-less room  
that I pretend has a top.  
Put me in there with people I've  
never met and place me  
where you want me.

Tell me when to smile  
and tell me when to cry.  
If my tears aren't enough,  
give me some that you've  
manufactured.

Shine a light in my eyes  
and tell me where to go  
and when to go  
and how quickly you  
want me to get there.

Put me in front of an  
audience and prime them  
to laugh whenever I make a joke.  
Make them think I'm funny.  
Make me think I'm funny.

Create a world for me.  
Give me a job and a house.  
Give me friends and family  
who looked okay in the screen test.  
Write an amazing ending for me.

Give me a script.  
Tell me I'm doing it right.

# *In This Room*

---

Evan Dekens

There's very little air in the room where they sit. They are lined along the walls, tiny heads on tiny bodies. They tell one another jokes. The room fills with laughter. They do not look at me when I come into the room. I thought they'd be like regular pets, except smaller obviously, and maybe a little smarter. When one goes away another takes its place.

It can be a homely place at times. They have the capacity to be nice to one another. Some choose not to, and when they do the place gets a lot less homely. But this place is not dead, like Mom and Dad say it is.

When the sun goes down, I imagine that they sleep for years. I wonder if they go far away when the window shades are drawn, and if they might even be allowed out of the cage to go back home sometimes, like on holidays. They sit and wait like monks. They replace one another when the sun rises. Sometimes the sky goes black. Sometimes they eat each other alive like king crabs in a cage, fighting, arguing, shooting each other mercilessly, stabbing and brawling with bayonets. My mom says that I have to stop paying attention to them when they do that and sends me to my room.

I watch from far away. They are much smaller than I, and so it is easier to keep them in good maintenance. Their eyes aren't what my mother would call the most "emotive" eyes she's ever seen.

To tell the truth I get attached. I'm not supposed to, but I do. Sometimes, especially the young ones, have the most beautiful eyes and wide toothless smiles. Sometimes they are kind to one another and work together to make the room clean and orderly and fun. They even sing songs sometimes. To be honest, sometimes it seems a lot more fun in there than it is out here. I guess it can be pretty lonely sometimes, in this room.

Sometimes, at night I worry about them. I scream at my parents to let them out. I do it a lot more than I probably should, but I'm really angry that they are locked up. My parents are worried that I have become attached. I can't help it, I just want them to come out and be my friends.

I have nightmares about them. I imagine doors opening outside my room and slamming shut, I hear them crashing, hundreds of them, one after the other, as loud as the ocean. I can feel the collective air from the suction blow my covers away. Then,



suddenly they are coming for me, all of them, all at once, each one slamming the door on their way in. They yell at me and scream that I haven't done anything. They cry and yell that all I do all day is watch them, that I can save them anytime I want to but that I choose to leave them in the cold metal box.

Then, when they are done yelling, they turn away from me and walk single file like ants out of my room. This is the type of dream where I cannot move even if I wanted to.

When I wake up I am drenched from head to toe and it is still night. I throw open the door of my bedroom and run into the living room to the cage. The curtain is drawn over them. I put my hands on the sides of the box and feel its weight. Then, I push with both hands until it tips over, falling to the ground and shattering into a million pieces. My mother storms out of her room, woken up by either my slamming door or the crash of the box and starts to scream, smacking me with a newspaper and leading me back to my room, telling me how long I'll be grounded, how many chores I will have to do, how sincerely I must apologize to my father for breaking the brand-new television.



## *Thank You to Our Contributors...*

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**Joshua Wescoat** is a graduating senior this semester, with a BFA in Illustration. After college, he hopes to move out west and begin a career with Pixar as a story board artist. Hobbies include comic books, video games, short walks on the beach and long walks through the men's locker room. If you want to see more of his artwork check him out on Instagram @ArtOfWescoat. Stay rad!

**Ben Kusik** "I am Ben, I make art. Hope you like what I have made. I have no statement other than: my art speaks for itself. So, enjoy."

**Alyssa Roberts** "My name is Alyssa, I am a freshman and I adore writing. I think the most fascinating part [of TNR] is hearing others' thoughts and critiques. This is because no one truly knows how the artist themselves felt while they were creating, only how their work makes the individual audience feel. I hope you enjoy my pieces as much as I enjoyed creating them. :)"

**Mia Rico** is a senior majoring in Animation. She hopes to one day work in the children's feature film/television industry either in visual development or as a texture artist.

**Yohan Rodriguez** "I was born in Cuba, and migrated to the States at the age of five. A whole new world opened up before my parents and I and showed us what it meant to be free. Liberated from the clutches of a Marxist-Leninist state where a mutter would get you thrown in jail. Here, I plan to voice all the symphonies of my soul and explore every avenue of truth and experience. I began by learning how to play guitar, which then transformed to piano, then to painting, then to photography and now I enjoy writing prose because it isn't constrained by rigid walls of form. It is formless, like water, so I let the thoughts flow and transpose them on paper in an attempt to understand the essence of myself and see my thoughts a'floating on the sea on my mentality."

**Sierra Javras** is a junior English and Economics double major who is obsessed with her two handsome cats, two lovely dogs, and two crazy ferrets. In her spare time she enjoys watching movies, listening to her above-average Spotify playlist, mastering thousand piece jigsaw puzzles, and, of course, bothering her pets.

**Ashley Altieri** is a graduating senior at Montclair State University, majoring in Psychology and English. She enjoys the diamond-scattered stars on clear nights, finding beauty in unlikely places, embodying the trickster archetype, and lots of coffee. She'd like to thank *The Normal Review* for continuing to be a beacon for creativity and student expression.

**Valerie Jaretsky** is in her last year at MSU (what?!) and has been involved with this magazine since her first (double what?!). Time flies. Reading, analyzing, and admiring the products of the talent that exists on this campus through *The Normal Review* has been one of her favorite parts of her time here. She is currently doing her student teaching in an eighth-grade English classroom and constantly reflecting back on her eighth-grade self.

**Mike Sano** is a Film major in his junior year, and first year at MSU as a transfer. He is glad he gets to share what he loves with his fellow students, that being screenwriting and drawing-- neither of which he will find useful or profitable uses for in his future. But he's having a good time doing them.

**Caroline Nelson** is scared of dentists and the dark. She is scared of pretty girls and starting conversations. All her friends are turning green.

**Kristy Lim** is currently a graduate student pursuing her Master of Arts in Teaching. She graduated in 2018 with her Bachelor of Arts in English. Kristy would like to be an English teacher and a published writer of fiction and poetry. Oh, and she would also like some inspiration as to a more creative way to end this biography. If you have any ideas, email her at [creativeendingsforauthorbiographies!!!@gmail.com](mailto:creativeendingsforauthorbiographies!!!@gmail.com).

**Jessica Petronzi** is a sophomore majoring in Animation/Illustration. Art has always fulfilled her and helped her through her journey on this earth. She enjoys crocheting, writing, photography, painting, drawing, music, film (anything form of art really!) Her dream is to travel the world, inspire others, restore the environment and to change the world for the better. If you're interested in seeing any of her art, take a peek on Instagram @jxssarts!

**Nubia Harmony Lumumba** is a senior at Montclair State University who is eagerly looking forward to graduating in the spring of 2019. She is an English major who is working on earning her K-6 teaching certification. Nubia loves hiking (because it is natural medicine for the mind and soul), learning survival skills (because you never know when you might get a call saying you were selected to be a contestant on *Survivor*), and she hopes to live off the grid one day. Her goals are too numerous, but some of them are: to live and teach in different places so that she can learn about and experience other beautiful cultures, to write a few children's books which she will share with the world, and to write an autobiography which she will keep to herself. Nubia's personal quote is "I am the only me there is, therefore I am precious, rare, and most certainly deserving of care."

**Monica Archer** has been a human since 1996 and a reader since 2001. She's still working on becoming a writer.

**Clayton Dobosh** is definitely not fifteen kittens wearing a human suit. Whoever told you that probably didn't tell you that Clayton Dobosh enjoys long walks in the DMZ, candlelit witchcraft ceremonies for one, and absurdist cinema. When he's not writing stories about scientists distracted by ethical dilemmas, Clayton Dobosh spends his time in cafés thinking about life and death and society and love and stuff.

**Kelsey Claesson** is a junior at Montclair State University, double majoring in Public Relations and English. She's currently a Social Media Producer with College Media Network, as well as a Receptionist at Grooves Unlimited Dance Studio and a Dance Teacher at Accents on Dance. In the future she hopes to work PR in the music industry and eventually go back to graduate school to become a high school English and Communications teacher. She enjoys writing, discovering new books and music, podcasts, and food.

**Evan Dekens** is a sophomore pursuing a degree as an English major and a film minor. He has been writing creative nonfiction, poetry, and short form fiction since high school and would like to pursue a career in creative writing in the future.

# Notes

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