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THE NORMAL REVIEW



SPRING 2017

The Normal Review

A Literary and Arts Publication

Montclair State University
Spring 2017

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by Devin Nunez

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Kyle Coan

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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:

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Questions, comments, concerns? Ask the editors.

We are always reachable through our emails:

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The Cards

Julia Williams
india ink on canvas paper

Perception! Hearsay

Monica Archer

“This is art!”

pronounced the woman who was blind.

“I’ve seen better,”

mused the man too far behind.

“You’re missing the meaning,”

his aunt explained over the phone.

“What a provoking piece,”

posted the professor online, sitting alone.

“A vulgar depiction,”

gasped the professor’s Facebook friend.

“You are ignorant,”

typed the lawyer, pressing send.

“I must have it!”

boomed the lawyer’s wealthy client.

“But you haven’t even seen it,”

the lawyer reminded the business giant.

“I don’t need to see it!

I’ll just send them a lot of cash!”

Four days later at his door,

the businessman found a pile of trash.

Peony

Jessica Schwartz

Tender darling,
pale with rose-colored skin—
enveloped in sweetness
while standing with pride,
you are sought after.
So delicate, so intricate,
you glint in the presence
of a gentle breeze.
With a sway of emotion,
you dare indulge in a tender touch.
Tragically designed,
you fall to pieces.

Modern Girl

Alyssa Shugayev

In silk-screened shirts
she fashioned, slipping
from her wire hanger
shoulders. Needle-thin.
That's what it was—
and the wrists.

I'm on the bough,
above the space
before consideration.
Hot-light lit
asphalt flower.

Go on,
let's see.

And nothing
in the trees I drew.

She's the tenth,
so I got
the Sapphic blues,
swallowing pheromones
for fork choices
and ellipses
while we yellow.



Tell No One

Kristy Lim
photography and photoshop

The Time Between

Jessica D'Onofrio

Even the house noticed her absence.

Each creak of the floorboards, each shudder of the rafters, each moan and groan and wheeze and sputter the settling home gave seemed in protest of her disappearance. That, however, wasn't what bothered the greying old man who sat alone in his living room, staring blankly at a book he had been trying to read for days now; the sounds of discomfort were welcomed—encouraged, even—to fill the space where nothingness resided. It was the silence that bothered him most, the harsh, deafening silence that acted as a constant, unbearable reminder of his newfound permanent state of being: alone.

Richard always hoped he would go first. With a faulty ticker and terrible lungs, it seemed almost guaranteed that he would get his wish. But she was always better than him, his Marion; even in death, she had to best him. The thought of her, ever victorious, brought about a bitter twinge of his lips; it was a pittance compared to what the thought of her used to do to him.

The armchair, faded and overstuffed, gave a sympathetic squeak as he shifted and, with trembling hands, took off the glasses that rested on the edge of his nose.

There wasn't so much as a spot on them, but the action kept him busy; he must have cleaned the damn things a dozen times in the last hour just to distract himself. The only thing worse than silence were his thoughts; they always seemed to turn to her. Always.

He could still see her sitting across from him, reading one of those terrible romance novels she was infatuated with. The love seat was hers; it had been from the day they moved in. It was an ugly old thing, a patchwork pea green with busted seams and mysterious stains and an odor that wasn't quite unpleasant but wasn't pleasant, either. It matched nothing else in their tight living room, not the orange curtains nor the muted yellow walls, not the red and beige striped pillows that sat on each end of the couch, nor the sandy brown end table littered with half-finished cups of coffee and magazines that dated back to the late nineties, but Marion never seemed to mind. It was a gift from her mother, and no matter how much he pleaded, she refused to part with it. His children grew up digging for buried treasure in those cushions, his children's children built forts from its extremities; with time, the eyesore grew on him. It was an extension of her and now, she was gone.

He hated that damn thing.

It was only after a gentle reminder from the clock on the mantle, an abnormally loud tick that broke him from his thoughts, that Richard finally decided the only thing the day had left to offer him was a night. Perhaps, if he was lucky, it would be his last.

He wasn't.

The stairs greeted him like old friends, obnoxiously and unwelcomingly chatty. The pictures on the wallpapers walls—wedding photos, school portraits, glimpses of past holidays and vacations—were unforgiving. They beamed at him, mocked him, reminded him of times that seemed forever ago now. The man in the photos, strapping and tan, with bushy eyebrows and a matting of dark hair, had no idea the anguish he would face decades in the

future when the stout brunette at his side would be gone from his arms, from his home, from his life. God, how he hated that man. How he envied him.

Every night it was the same thing; every night the house haunted him.

The bedroom was uncharacteristically dark, the kind of dark that was too light to be black but too black to be light. Drawn curtains allowed in not so much as a sliver of silvery moonlight, keeping the truth of the world at bay, leaving him alone with his thoughts. Marion would whisk them open each morning, alleviating the constant state of gloomy darkness her husband was content to bask in. No, Marion wanted light, she wanted life. With her, every room in the house seemed to glow. With her, the house settled with gentle hums and airy sighs. With her, the house was not a house, but a home.

Without her: gloom.

Without her: groans.

Their bed was cold. The springs cried under him, shifting and bending as he climbed under the covers. That side was used to a lighter presence, a tiny old woman who weighed no more than the wind. The new inhabitant was unwelcome, weighed down by the density of his sorrows, but he didn't seem to pay much mind to that. No, the tired old man slid into her empty spot with ease, his face half buried in a pillow that, if he closed his eyes and wished hard enough, might still hold traces of her.

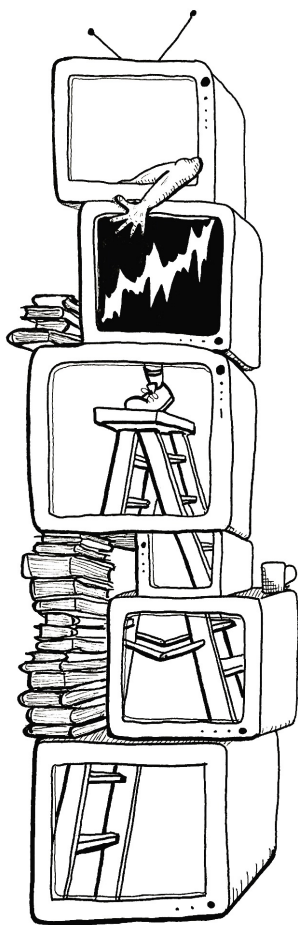
The house quieted, listening.

It waited for a "Goodnight, dear."

It waited for a retuning “You too, love.”

It received nothing.

It groaned its complaint.



Trapped
Walt Brandt
acrylic paint on canvas

Aversion

Sean Johnston

Wading, shear but sheathed,
Beneath, pooled in thread,
Overhead a screaming ceiling projection,
The reel bleats, creaks, flickers,
And speaks stills into being.

Freeing frozen millimeters
While the I is feet and inches,
And the eye messes meaning,
Missing equal opposite
On which it leans.

Together they catch depth
For seconds,
When dearly pulsing chest
Suggests that flesh should press,
But head won't let the rest connect.

It turns instead to the floor,
Or the air between points.
Always an abrupt aversion.



Untitled

Evan A. Johnson
photography

A Bag of Badgers

Caroline Nelson

Before the shadows in my sketchbook nightmares
set the spinning drill bit
To fit the notches of my vertebrae,
I heard them say,
“We’re going to torture you
Until you’re sleepy as a bag of badgers.”

I can only imagine how sleepy
a sack full of virulent varmint would be.
I assume that their soft sweet snores
would sound of a hen with clipped wings
learning to fly over the mouth of a wood-chipper;
and that the vibrations of their dream-like murmurs
would resemble the massacre of Egyptian cotton;
a sound akin to ripping the last chapters out of library books.

I can imagine the badgers spilling out of their woven womb,
thrusting their India ink noses into the air
and opening their eyes for the first time.
Eyes like the prisms my mother kept in the kitchen windows back
home,
casting rainbows
on the linoleum floors.

Perched on the gray granite counter,
in the quiet cold of morning,
my dreams slide over me
like my tongue on the chipped lip of a teacup.



Wise One

Samantha Smith

watercolor, ink, and colored pencils



Common Starling

James Barker
photography

On being someone I did not want to be:

Katherine Shanks

I can't raise to my mouth a taste I once strived for,
And the fact I can't is equally indigestible.
One part because of the reflux,
Two parts because of how I am looked at as a crime scene.

1.

A girl with square glasses,
And a heart as cool as fresh-washed lettuce.
Long hair, Mom's love,
Dad's okayness.

2.

A girl with no glasses,
A heart like a telephone pole.
Somewhat shorter hair, Mom's shorter breath,
Dad's palms gripping the oh-so-breakable wrists.

3.

A girl with winter in her nose,
A girl who isn't here, isn't a girl.
Distance and three onions in her hand,
Dad's eyes coming out of his skull to eat her alive.

His maggot-filled smile is an exit wound,
Only worth forgetting.
I have asked nicely, and not so nicely,
For the food between his teeth to leave me alone.

For my mom: I can't.

For myself: getting my foot through the door even if I have a rock
in my shoe.

For the rest of the world: I am the crime scene and the monster.



Untitled 2

Devin Nunez
spray paint on glossy poster board

Another One

Editor's Choice

Christopher Schneider

Space. They told me I'd love it up here. They said I'd have time to think, to sort myself out. Ugh.

Three whiskeys in and I'm still wishing I were back on Earth, wasting away my years in my apartment, my apartment; not this...cell.

That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

"Mr. Erral, another drink and you're sure to collapse,"

"Sure I am," I massage the stubble on my chin. "Didn't know you could calculate my blood alcohol content from way up there."

I chuckle.

"Mr. Erral, put the drink down and get your rest."

I take another swig, nearly choking on the fumes.

"Okay, okay," I rest the glass on the nightstand, burrowing myself beneath the sheets. Soon I won't need the drink, they said. Soon I'll be poison-free. Soon I'll be cleared to enjoy every beautiful waking moment in picturesque sobriety. Soon.

It wasn't long after they turned out the light that I reached for the glass. They turned the light back on. Blinding.

"Mr. Erral, another drink and you're sure to collapse."

That voice over the loudspeaker again. Cracked, whirring,

like vinyl held against a rotating tire, until it's smooth and its frequencies are in sync. It's there to sort me out. Get my head straight. So I can think. Sort myself out.

“Oh, another one won't hurt,” I told it. I poured myself another glass. “It makes the transition to sleep a little easi—” I began.

The door opened, and they came in, dressed in matte black; hard plastic, I think. They hit my knees first. I collapsed. Hit my head; transition made simple. Straightened me out, gave me time to think.

In my dreams, I always see it. This indigo sphere. A deep violet. Humming in the far reaches of the cosmos, murmuring, whizzing. It shines. It floats closer and closer to my vision. It emanates warmth and comfort, and I reach out to it. I try to hug it and my skin ages; it decays and flakes.

“Another one won't hurt,” it whispers. And I wake up.

It's never any easier when you wake up. Cheap fucks. My head hurts, agonizing.

That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Erral. Are you hungry?”

I don't know why it asks. The man in black brings me the same scrambled eggs and bacon every time, but I like Taylor ham. They know that. So I grunt and roll back over.

He comes in, the steel tray clinking against the nightstand. The familiar swoop of the door closing behind him. The eggs are runny and the bacon feels like pavement on my tongue. That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.” It’s assuring, calming, I’m on the right track.

“Right,” I grumble. Brain food. Straighten my head, sort myself out. Need some time to think.

I pace around the room, waiting for that undisclosed time of day, gazing out at the universe, waiting for what looks like China to be at the top left. Bunch of puzzle pieces. Jigsaws of existence.

That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

“Is there anything in particular you would like to do today, Mr. Erral?”

I sway on my tip-toes for a second. I answer.

“Anything—”

“Anything within reason, of course.” Of course. I’m thirsty. They said I wouldn’t need the drink after a few weeks. I’d be able to sort myself out, think clearly.

“I’m thirsty.”

Bottled water shoots up from a clear tube in the tile floor, cold to the touch.

“Enjoy,” the voice says. Harmonic, enticing. Thank you, I will.

“You got it, pal.”

Water is pretty good. Nothing like the warmth of a stiff drink. That’s what I want, they said I wouldn’t need it, but I want it, that’s what I’m thinking.

“Break out the good stuff.”

“Mr. Erral, you’ve resided here for approximately 244 days. Why do you think you still need alcohol?”

“That’s what you said 244 days ago,”

“No, I didn’t. 244 days ago, you—”

“Yeah, I know. It was a joke,” Silence for a moment. A laugh track plays for an instant. Children and adults, cackling. Makes me sick.

“Good one, Mr. Erral.”

Haha.

I place the plastic bottle under my sheets and decide to take a nap. Need a good night’s rest, straighten my head out, give myself some time to think. As my thoughts begin to dissolve into the sphere, the loudspeaker starts up again. That horn from that old TV show. The car horn. Loud. Tires screeching, metal hugging concrete, scraping. Tiny molecules of glass cascading about, bouncing off my face like rain. They like to scare me. They like to remind me of my wrongdoings. Reminds me why I’m here. I sweat, my body jerks to avoid something, but there’s nothing. Every time.

“How about some puzzles?” it asks. I put my head in my hands. Brain teasers. Sorts my thoughts, helps me think clearly.

“Sure, why the fuck not?”

A table rises from a space on the floor. On it lies a Sudoku book and a pencil, sharpened to perfection. I look at it. For a little too long.

“Mr. Erral, personnel are standing by in the event—”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” I wave my hand. “No need to worry, old friend. I don’t plan on going anywhere anytime soon.” I look out into the nothingness. Stark white droplets contrasting the impenetrable dark. I look up for a second in thought. A laugh track plays. Positive reinforcement.

“Good one, Mr. Erral.”

“Thank you. I’ll be here all week,” I doodle on the Sudoku book. Numbers and boxes and stuff. Too convoluted for me. Complicates things. Clouds my head, can’t think straight. Another laugh track plays. Blessed with a chorus this time, angelic.

“Good one, Mr. Erral.” I nod. I just need to keep this going for a little longer. Think about that undisclosed time, when China is in the top left. Such a tease. Try to pass the time, do some of the puzzles, sort my head out, keep myself occupied.

“Done,” I say.

“A whole page, Mr. Erral, well done,” it says. I put the book back on the table and lean back on my bed as it slides down into the floor, covered by the tile. Peering out from under my eyelids, I see that puzzle piece fit into its rightful home and I know it’s that undisclosed time. I straighten myself up, my thoughts focused on that shifting puzzle piece.

“It’s about that time,” I say.

“It seems so,” Up from the floor rises another table with a clear bottle of whiskey and an immaculate drinking glass. I pounce on it, pouring myself a refreshment.

“Gets better every time,” I say. No laugh track this time. Such a good drink. They said after a while I wouldn’t need the drink. I’d straighten out so long as I had time to think. I’m thinking I’m pretty thirsty.

Three whiskeys in and I’m still wishing I were back on Earth, wasting away my years in my apartment, my apartment; not this... cell. I remember staring at my home. That tiny gray dot buried in the vast emerald of the puzzle piece. I could see them all, cheering me on, so hopeful for me, so stuffed with ignorance. I’m glad I got rid of them. At least now I can drink when I’m thirsty, and I think I am.

But I guess I don’t miss it all that much. I don’t miss the whining pipes, or the steel floor, or the steel walls, or the lights that never fucking turn off, or the horns, or the footsteps, or the alarms, or the bars, or the people calling day in and day out, knocking at my door, begging me to talk to them. It’s okay, they would say. It’s never fucking okay.

I shouldn’t miss the bars. And I don’t, not really. I’m just thirsty. But I won’t need it after a little while. Been straightening myself out, thinking clearly.

Puzzle pieces out of order.

“Well, Mr. Erral?”

That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

“Huh?”

“Thirsty?”

That table rises up from the floor. How long's it been?
Doesn't seem right. This isn't supposed to be disclosed. Not until
China is...

"No thanks."

I stand up straight as the table slides back into the floor.

"No one-liners today, Mr. Erral?"

"No, figured a change was in order. Clear answers move
things along smoother,"

"Well put."

"Thank you."

"With change comes opportunity,"

"So I've heard."

The intercom buzzes off, and I'm left to toil about in my
glass prison. I want a drink, but it's not right. Not right now.

When the pieces lined up, I waited. For a while.

And when the floor didn't open, I got angry. The tiles rear-
ranged themselves time and time again until my knuckles bled and
my bones ached. I couldn't crack the window. That'd be silly.

It wouldn't answer me, no matter what I said or how loud I
said it. I'd never felt my throat split like bark on a dying tree before
or my body crumple like its falling leaves. I'd never felt my eyes
erupt like geysers or my screams echo through the vacuum, but
they did. I'd never felt my body tremble like an infant in the cold,
but it did. I yearned for the warmth, the comforting embrace of the
sphere.

I seldom see it in my dreams now, when I do dream at least. It hangs in the background while I sleep. My hands grip the wheel smoothly as my mother attempts to tear it from me, but she's already gone. My brother and sister too. Tires screeching, metal hugging concrete, scraping. Tiny molecules of glass cascading about, bouncing off my face like rain. They float away, into the sphere, while I sweat and my body jerks from something but there's nothing. I wake up crying, cursing the poison as my family ascends. It's okay they said.

But it's never fucking okay.

That gray dot slides into view, hovering peacefully. As I glare at it I long for its normalcy, for when things were sorted out, when they were clear. It's my only picture of home, family, times long passed. My only memento. It's the only reason why I leave my bed now.

Up from the floor rises a table with a clear whiskey bottle and a drinking glass.

That voice comes over the loudspeaker again.

"Thirsty?"

As I stare, the dot trolls its way across the rotation, nearing the edge of the world. Already I long for its return.

"No."

It was a moment or two before it sank back into the floor.

"Mr. Erral, you have successfully gone two months without a drink."

“Yeah, but who’s counting, right?” That fucking laugh track again.

“Good one, Mr. Erral.” I lay back down on my bed, still gazing at the puzzle pieces assembling themselves, gliding ever so gracefully to completion. “I am pleased to inform you that the requirements of your sentence have been met and you have been cleared for reassimilation. How does it feel?”

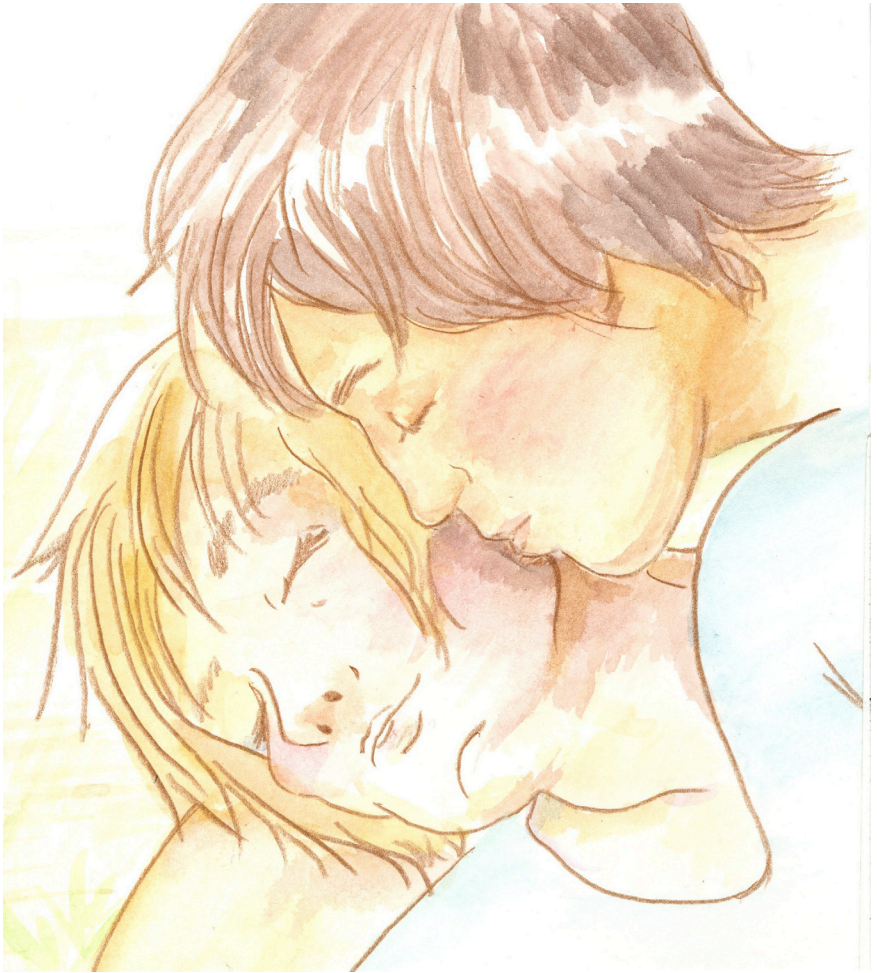
The gray dot grew dark, fading away beneath the stars. I sigh.

“Okay.”



So Cal

Michael Telewiak
photoshop



Momo and Nashi

Julia Williams
watercolor and color pencils on bristol

Her and I in the Cosmos

J. A. Salimbene

Her short hair still flows
As endlessly as the cosmos.
Like the luminescent sparkles
Of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and on,
Her eyes add two more stars
To the view. My one wish
Is to be the jacket that warms
Her from the unknown black matter,
Outside our tin can miles
Above the rich and smooth
Sands that don't compare
To the soft naked fabric
That covers her beautiful bones.
Our bones would rattle together.
The further we float, the happier
I am that it's us up here.
Lovingly entangled
In the cold, in the silence,
In the dark, in the dark
Roast coffee can. An unearthly
Comfort unearths from wrapping
Our rattling bones together
That's only otherwise found
Ironically in our beds on Mother Earth.

We'll see our breath and giggle.
We'll press our lips together as
The temperature plummets and
Our vitals viciously valley.
As her short hair still flows as
Endlessly as the cosmos around us,
I'll think, what a painless death.

Flowers 4

Kevin Jun Ha

Boy with gut-flowers
unlearns the vines
of home—the red brick
where grandfather dreamt
palaces into the wet concrete

He shines with duty at every crack & crumble

Boy remembers his
marriage to the soil, the
rain, as his grandmother
pushed miracle seeds for Perilla,
leaving the heart warm and stomach fed

She buries her guilt with the Shih Tzu she named

The boy smells
the old Parliaments, and
the noxious way he learned
to detest the authority of a broken tongue
(English of suffering or Great Migration)

He amputates his loveful hands for a beating stick

Mugunghwa is his
mother's signature, how she
bloomed & wilted through the
moods the boy swung so battle-axe

She armors her sacred heart against two angry men

His brother's blood is
fertilizing Norwood soil,
And boy does his best to tend
the weeping Jeju cherry blossom
as the family learns to mourn



Sunlight and Greenery

Alf Fenton
photography



As Long as You Know

Monica Krawiec
photography

Snapdragon

Editor's Choice

Caroline Nelson

I think snapdragons are dreaming of flight.
Stubbornly flourishing in fiction
cast by the flickering wind,
they are careful not to blink open their blooms;
their jaws, tightly drawn in,
clamshells, impervious to the tumult of dawn.

And when wild fingers
pry their lips apart,
they strike like
fire-breathing beasts
released from honey-laden sleep.

With wicked freckled tongues unfurling,
the frightful flowers
gather up their unborn breath,
as if to warn that
they might not scorch and screech,
but they were born from poison seeds.

I used to give my mother snapdragons,
inspired by their ridged spines
and burning hues
of cerise, vermilion, and saffron.

She abandoned them in the living room
next to her mug of Irish breakfast tea.
Their roots would ache for rocky perches,
as they'd crane their verdant vertebrae
to glimpse the sun through the heavy cotton curtains.

Do You Think We See the Same Birds?

Kevin Farrell

After I got back from Afghanistan, I searched for that old familiar feeling of fire inside my chest with women who looked just like Amanda. When they ended up not being her, as they always did, I swallowed a few drinks and wasn't so sure anymore. Her lips...their lips, electrified my veins. I'd hold them close like I held her before and I'd kiss their necks like I used to kiss hers. It became most obvious that they weren't Amanda when I'd wake up the next morning and they were still there. They stayed while she left, and I hated them for not being her.

#

I was out at a bar with Specialist Garcia and Sergeant Pichardo. They had just been hired by a local police department and we were celebrating. It was late and I was tired from working my security guard job all day, so I ordered a Red Bull and vodka. With that, plus the shots we took when we first got to the bar and the vodka and pineapple juice I had before I even left my house, I was fading in and out of where I was and where I had been. The bar was dark, like the dirt roads outside of Kabul at night, and the bass from the music boomed like far-off explosions. Across the room, I saw a girl with blonde bangs that hung over blue eyes. I walked over to her and tried to explain how safe we were at the bar and how amazing it was, but I couldn't get the right words out and I started apologizing. I kept asking her where she had gone, even though she had been in front of me the whole time. Garcia grabbed my arm and pulled me away from her. We left the bar and walked outside through the warm air. We passed a group of girls standing

on the sidewalk and one of them had blonde hair and a shirt with bluebirds printed on it. We continued walking up the street towards the parking garage, past a square with trees and grass and statue of George Washington and Marquis de LaFayette. A bird sat on top of George's head and it watched me as I stumbled up the street.

“Do you think we see the same birds?” I asked Pichardo.

“What?”

“Do you ever wonder when you see a bird, if you've seen it before? Like, maybe a month or two or even a year earlier? Usually I see birds they're just birds, it's hard to think of them as individuals. But some of them have to be the same ones, right?”

“What are you talking about? Who cares?”

“I don't know, nothing, nobody I guess. I was just curious.”

“Concentrate on not throwing up, okay? I don't want you puking in my car again.”

“Yeah, yeah, no I'm fine, it's just, that girl in the bar's name was Charlotte. When I was a kid, I had a bird named Charlotte. I left her cage open one day, by mistake, and I guess she flew out a window. I didn't even notice until a few hours later, when I went back into the kitchen to grab some food. She never came back.”

“What the hell is Sullivan talking about?” Garcia asked.

“I have no idea,” Pichardo said.

“You have too much time on your hands,” Garcia said to me.

“What do you expect?” I said. “We trained for over two

years to go to war, spent a year over there, and now we're home and the war is over. There's nothing but time left. The rest of life is too much time."

"You're driving, right?" Garcia asked Pichardo.

"Yes," Pichardo said.

"So you've never thought about the bird thing?" I asked.

"No."

"You kinda technically thought about it when I mentioned it."

"I didn't even think of it then."

"Well then you didn't even process the question."

"Will you shut up?" Garcia said.

"Maybe I did see Charlotte again. Her feathers could have changed color. That happens to birds, right? I could see her every day and not know it. She could live in that tree right there." I pointed at a tree in the middle of the park. "Hey Amanda! I'm sorry I didn't pay closer attention! I hope you're doing well!"

I threw up on the sidewalk and Pichardo drove me home. The next morning I lay in bed with a hangover as a group of birds chirped loudly outside my window. One of them sat quietly in the tree, and watched me as I got up and closed the window.



Untitled

J. A. Salimbene
photography

untitled

Ashley Altieri

you whisper to me,
“what are you?”

i'm a goddess

i'm a goddess

i'm a goddess,

i'm nothing.

Atlantis

Alyssa Shugayev

Earth to Gold-Star,
you are nebula-born.
I'm skipping stones
 and skipping stones
until they brush off.

Filthy-fingered,
feeling helium inflated,
she dug me out
from under
Maslow's third tier.

Poseidon's trident
stick-and-poked
into her hip—
I have a palate
for the uncharted.

She knew
it wasn't waving
when I flatlined,
propelling too far
past the pillars.



Speak Now

James Barker
photography



The Wave Samurai

Julia Williams

india ink and watercolor on bristol

The Man in the Black Water

Brygida Dabek

He wants me to join him
in the black waters
where he lay dormant
because he,
just like me,
is tired of being good
is tired of being fake
is tired of being bright
is tired of being

I love him so
the beautiful man consumed by darkness
my heart aches with the desire
to know what's beneath the surface
of the black waters
when I reach to touch his face
he recoils, he
is afraid of being touched
is afraid of being loved
is afraid of losing control
is afraid of himself

So when the darkness pulls at him
the tension at the surface

the release of weightlessness
he slips further into the water
and extends his hand to me
he reaches into my chest
expecting to feel an empty cavern
but I feel his fingertips
caressing what's left of me

He smiles
but I look into his eyes
they are empty
they are sad
they are so beautiful
I know that I cannot go with him

but I cannot go without him
so when he's gone,
I hear his voice in my dreams,
as I often do,
pleading, "make me good, God, but not yet."





The Man in the Black Water

Brygida Dabek
photography

Run, David, Run

Gil Moreno

Before David and Elizabeth were married, they swore to each other they would grow old together. They had a small wedding of no more than seventy-five guests at a vineyard in West Park, NY. It was autumn. David had paired his tuxedo with a black and white polka-dot bowtie, and Elizabeth had worn a shortened more modest version of the traditional dress, also with polka-dots, black ones. His brown eyes looked into her green eyes, and from that moment they were husband and wife.

David was a writer and had already published one novel for which he had received a great deal of recognition. Elizabeth was having great success of her own as an advertising executive in a smaller agency. Because they were busy and enthusiastic about their careers, they waited three years before having children, and then had two boys, which they raised in their pre-war apartment on the Upper West Side.

When David got close to finishing his third book, he spent weekends in their small cottage in the Hudson Valley. It was not fancy, but it had charm. It was on one of these writing weekends that David disappeared. He never saw his family again, until recently when he burst through Elizabeth's door. It had been almost twenty-five years that he'd last seen her.

Run, David, Run, he thought. He had just kicked a man in the stomach and bashed another in the head with a small

oxygen tank. Both men were knocked out for the moment, giving him enough time to push the van doors open. The van was still moving as David jumped out. He was wearing a hospital robe and underneath, an outfit similar to hospital scrubs, but made of a heavy paper. From down the street, he heard the tires screech. When he turned, two of the men were running towards him. For the next few hours, he jumped in and out of alleys and hid behind dumpsters and climbed fire escapes. It didn't occur to him until much later why he had not been winded or felt tired as he should have. After all, he was sixty.

Several hours later, he awoke on a bed of moist green grass. Above him, the sky was just beginning to turn. He rolled his head to the left, where the purple pink horizon was inching over the tops of the lowest buildings and then to the right, where in the distance it was still dawn. Two joggers came past. They both looked at him then disappeared into the nearby wooded area.

From where he sat he could see the building where he had lived. Elizabeth, I hope you're there, he thought. Once out of the park, he ran into a shop on the opposite corner, just a block from his building. He walked up to the counter. An older man was standing behind the register, filling in the Cannabis jars. He smiled. One of his teeth on the top row was missing.

“Good morning,” the old man said.

“Can I use your phone? It's an emergency.”

“Sure, come this way.” The old man was chewing on a red coffee stirrer.

David looked at the phone device, but did not understand

how to operate it. The old man recognized his confusion. “Need help?”

“Uh! Yes, please. I don’t know how to use this.” The old man was surprised. These phones were not new. They’d been around for a few years.

“Okay, you press the screen here, speak the number and then tell it to dial.”

David followed the old man’s instructions, but the number came back unrecognized.

“It won’t recognize the number!” David yelled.

The older man grabbed a pad and pen. “What’s the number?”

“212-505-2019.”

The older man laughed. “You pulling my leg with this number? We haven’t used one of these in years. It should be six symbols.”

There it was, the one clue that would raise many questions.

“May I see a newspaper?” David looked around, but did not see any.

“Newspaper? Where you been, young fellow? We don’t have those either. It’s all electronic. Gets sent here when you plug in.” The man turned and pointed to a tiny hole just behind his ear. It looked like a headphone jack.

“So, phones are different, new numbers, and no newspapers?”

“That’s right, fellow.” The old man looked David over. He leaned in a bit and took a whiff of the vacant air. “Say, are you drunk or something?”

“What’s today’s date?”

“Why, it’s the sixteenth of June. See here, fellow, June 16, 2042,” the older man pointed a shaky crooked finger at a calendar behind the counter.

“2042?” He looked up and shook his head. He thought, how can it be?

“Are you alright, fellow? You don’t look so good.” Then he looked around and leaned in. “You know I use to drink the hard stuff myself, but I also lost track of time, and half my liver, too. I’m lucky to be standing here now.” David said nothing and ran out.

A few minutes later David reached his old building. The doorman was standing outside. Because the doorman’s cap lay low on his head David was able to sneak past without being seen. He pushed through the doors, but the doorman followed. “Sir, you can’t go in there. You’re not a resident.”

David stopped and turned his head, but then kept walking towards the elevator. He stepped in and repeatedly pushed the button for the tenth floor. The doorman kept shouting. Again, he said, “You don’t live here.”

David kept pushing the door close button, but the doorman kept the elevator there by pressing the up button. The doorman stuck in the elevator key, which shut the elevator down, and stood blocking the door. David bolted out, pushing the doorman to the

floor. He stood in the middle of the lobby. His disheveled hair and patient's garb made him look mad. Then he remembered the stairs behind the mail room.

He rang the bell and pounded on the door with fisted hands.

“Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Ian! Aaron!”

He pressed his ear to the door. There wasn't a sound. Then the door opened. A woman in her late fifties stood before him. She resembled Elizabeth. Her hair was grey around her face. When the woman saw him, she leaned against the door for support. Her skin turned pale.

“Elizabeth, it's me.”

“David?” She screamed, and tried to close the door. David thrust his foot in between the door and the frame.

“Elizabeth, don't you recognize me? I recognize you.”

“But you haven't aged, David.”

“What do you mean?” David pushed the door and stared into the mirror on the wall. It was true he hadn't aged. Not one day since he was last here. It was the first time he'd seen himself in all those years.

“I don't understand. You look just as you did the day you left.”

“I didn't leave. Not voluntarily. I was abducted.”

“What do you mean abducted? By who?”

“You mean by what? Elizabeth, I’ve been studied and probed and experimented on for what I thought was just a few days but apparently, it’s been years. Decades. How else would I not have aged?”

“I still don’t believe this. Am I losing my mind? How do you disappear for over twenty years and come back now? How do I know it’s you?”

“I know Elizabeth. It sounds preposterous. But you have to believe me. How can I prove it? Okay, Okay, ask me something, anything.”

“I don’t know. I’m really scared right now.” Elizabeth put her hands over her face.

“Remember that restaurant we went to the night before we got married? The Corner Cupboard. I told you that there wasn’t anything I wanted more in life than to grow old with you. Remember that? We were in the middle of dessert, and you stuck your finger in the frosting of your cake and dabbed it on my nose. You said you were doing it then because you thought that the wedding cake in the face thing was tacky.”

“I believe you, David. I believe you now.”

“I need to lie down, Elizabeth. May I? I’m not feeling well.”

“Of course, you can lie down. Ian’s old room.”

“How are you feeling, David? I thought we’d lost you.”
The man stared down at him. He smiled. There was something

sadistic in his smile. His eyes seemed to pop. He looked demented.

David turned the other way; he licked his lips. He swirled his tongue, trying to make saliva. “May I have a glass of water?”

The nurse poured him some water from a small glass pitcher. She held his head up while he took sips.

“First of all, don’t worry about your wife. We gave her something before we left. She’ll think the whole thing was a dream, as will the doorman.” The man leaned back. “David, do you remember twenty-five years back when you did one of those awful mail-in DNA tests? One of them was called XY-me. We didn’t give you much information, but we sure as hell learned a lot about you, buddy. You had the genetic mutation we needed for our work.” The man laughed. David laid in the bed unmoving. The lights in the room were dim except for the one focused on David’s face. It hurt his eyes.

“We’ve never explained this to you because, well, we didn’t need to. Besides, you’ve spent the past twenty-five years in a cryogenic state. We needed to preserve you. But we had to bring you out of it for transport. That’s when this whole unfortunate thing happened.” David sat up. He looked around, but there was no way out. The room was secure. No windows, no visible seams for a door. Nothing.

“Have I been in New York all this time?”

“Yes, David. Right here.”

“But where are we?”

“I’m sorry, David. I can’t give you that information. I can

tell you that we are in the business of youth. But our formula will only work on people with this genetic mutation of yours. That is why you have not aged. Cryogenics preserves you, but our money-maker TX-120 keeps you young. That's the gold nugget. And that is why we need you. We are close to cloning this genetic mutation of yours. It's amazing, really." He laughed again. The nurse also laughed.

"Don't worry, David, you haven't missed much."

David thought differently. He thought about Elizabeth and how he had missed growing old with her. He leapt forward, wrapping his hands around the man's throat. Then he felt a prick and blacked-out.



TRUMP TAKES IT

DANIMATION
ART BY DANIEL R. HILTON

Trump Takes It

Daniel R. Hilton
adobe photoshop



Neptune

Samantha Smith
acrylic and pastel pencils

Echoes

Stephanie Smith

Teach me Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin
and about things open and closed
No need for a door on
the cliffs of Moher
Talk of women and moss
and paths of wind carrying
the mispronunciation of names
out and in Ireland
Echoes from non-cliffs
scatter as in-betweens

A Prayer for the Return of Innocence

Monica Archer

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

It seems the morality of the world has thinned,
and it's becoming hard to differentiate
how to be good, and how to be great.

There's so much negativity swirling around,
and, although unfortunate, I have found
that it's so easy to get swept up by society,
and so easy to be remiss in one's piety.

I long to be a better person.

I don't want to continuously worsen and worsen.

Can you help me act as though I'm a saint?

Make me in your image, the way an artist can paint.

I just need your guidance and your aid,

I need more confidence in the me that you made.

Because if I stare hard right into a mirror,
there's a person I'm becoming, and frankly, I fear her.

Help me to be in the world and not of it.

Help me to embrace my true self and love it.

And in the face of the world's crass, ignorant, braying,
help me to just keep on loving and praying.

Wallflower

Jessica Schwartz

She is blended into concrete,
into the brushstrokes of an orange sky.
Her perspective a stranger that dwells in books,
bending and bowing at her will,
black and white.
Her mind is like an exhale of thoughts in a silent room,
filled to the brim with the fullness of space,
privacy a guarded pleasure.
She blinks in the starry darkness of day,
amid incessant voices and unnerving silence
and the gravity of things falling in and out of place.
Rolling clouds hypnotize passersby,
blowing through thoughts of fallen dreams
and rows of upside-down umbrellas
with a glittering fog.
Sunlit curtains dress her heart,
but they are never drawn for too long,
lest the colors will begin to fade.
She is blended into charcoal,
into the stillness of morning tea,
with feather-like passion.

paradise

Anijeh Green

in the hood, gunshots begin to sound
a lot like all the bones in your body
breaking if you listen close enough.
spilled blood becomes a hymn that we
sing to ourselves and our children and
our children's children. prayers become
poems in which we plead for skies to be
cracked open and seas to be parted as
we walk through the valley of the
shadow of death.

it is not the eden we imagined.
it is not the heaven that we hoped for.

paradise is a war that we inherited from
our fathers.

only the savvy survive.



Stop Analyzing

Walt Brandt
acrylic paint on canvas

Too Many Likes: Episode 1

Stephanie Castiglia

(Maxine's lip gloss and other items went missing but, when they were found, they were in Ashlie's purse. Because Maxine doesn't think Ashlie will tell the truth if she confronts her, Ashlie's bestie Kaycee will be interrogating her).

Kaycee's House, Beverly Hills, California

Ashlie: K, I'll tell you like, everything I know. There was a key, some lip gloss and like, a hair tie, but I didn't know it was Maxine's. *(Applies the lip gloss and takes a selfie).*

Kaycee: Umm, like, Maxine wants to know umm, like, how her stuff like, ended up in your umm, like, purse.

Ashlie: I LIKE, DON'T KNOW, K! And like, why the hell is she like, making you like, ask these questions?

Kaycee: Umm, like, IDK.

Interview

Kaycee: Umm, like, Ashlie is like, super pissed about this and like, IDK why.

Kaycee's House, Beverly Hills, California

Ashlie: Like, where the hell is she? *(Still using the lip gloss).*

Maxine: *(Coming down the stairs in Kaycee's living room).* Are you seriously using my lip gloss even though you know it's mine?

Ashlie: *(ignores Maxine and continues to use the lip gloss).*

Maxine: *(Raises her voice)*. Hey, Asslie, I asked you a question!

Ashlie: Hey, b*tch, how like, many times do I have like, to tell you? My name is.....ASHLIEEEEEEEEE! *(Throws the lip gloss at Maxine)*.

Maxine: *(Stands there stunned for a minute)*.

Interview

Ashlie: Like, if she's so smart then like, why does she keep like, messing up my name? She totes deserved it, and I like, don't feel like, bad.

Kaycee's House, Beverly Hills, California

Maxine: I'm going to do what your incapable parents should've done to you sixteen years ago. *(Reaches over Ashlie's tall body and begins to yank her platinum blonde hair)*.

Ashlie: Hey! Like, let go, it's not like, my fault that like, you don't like, have blonde hair. *(kicks Maxine in the shin)*.

Maxine: Your hair's fake. Not only do you bleach it, you get extensions from poor kids! *(tries to slap Ashlie)*.

Ashlie: *(Digs her manicure into Maxine's pale wrist)*.

Maxine: *(Screams)* Oh my God, you animal!

Kaycee: *(Whining and trying to pry the girls off each other)* Omg, guys, stop!

Interview

Kaycee: Umm, like, Ashlie and Maxine never like, get along that like, great. Umm but like, it never like, usually gets like, physical.

Kaycee's House, Beverly Hills, California

Ashlie: HAH! Got your weave, bitch! (*waves Maxine's black extensions in the air*). So much for being the most natural girl in Beverly Hills!"

Maxine: (*Jumps in the air for it*) Give it back, Asslie!"

Ashlie: (*purposely keeps it out of her reach*).

Maxine: (*Storms out of the living room and heads straight for the kitchen*).

Ashlie: (*Shouting*) Now like go gorge yourself you, like, fat tub of lard!

Kaycee: (*slightly shaking*) Omg, like that was so like, cray cray like, totes too like, out of control.

Maxine: (*Comes back into the living room, with an item that can't be identified too well*).

Interview

Kaycee: Umm, like, I was like, trying to like, calm Ashlie down. Umm, and then like, all of a like, sudden, Maxine like, comes out of the like, kitchen and like, she like, literally looked like umm, like, those scary creeps in the like, scary movies.

Kaycee's House, Beverly Hills, California

Maxine: (*Grabs a chunk of Ashlie's hair, and cuts it*).

Ashlie: OMG! WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO ME? (*Begins sobbing as she picks up cut pieces of her hair*).

Kaycee: (*screaming*) LIKE THAT'S LIKE IT! LIKE I'VE HAD

LIKE ENOUGH OF YOU LIKE B*TCHES AND YOUR LIKE FCKING B*LLSH*T!”

Ashlie: *(freezes holding her cut hair).*

Maxine: *(Stands stunned by Kaycee’s outburst).*

Kaycee: Like, give me those like scissors. *(Breathing heavily, as she snatches the scissors out of Maxine’s hand).* And like both of you like get out. LIKE, NOW! *(pointing toward the front door in the foyer).*

Ashlie: *(Reluctantly hands Maxine the key).*

Maxine: *(walks to her expensive car, starts it up, and drives it away).*

Ashlie: *(Watches Maxine drive off, and starts walking home).*

Last Interviews (Each girl was interviewed individually)

Kaycee: Umm like, when Maxine started to like, cut Ashlie’s like, hair I like, knew that’s when like, sh*t got like, too far. *(Tries not to cry).* Umm I like, tried to like, stop it. *(starts full on crying).*

Producer: I know.

Kaycee: I like, just like, couldn’t *(Producer reaches over to hug her, which she embraces).*

Ashlie: *(Still sobbing, which is making her words barely understandable).* That b*tch like, ruined my like, hair. Do you like, know like, how long it will like, take to like, fix it? *(Holds up the remains of her hair).* I have to like, wait until the like, next episode, if there is like, a next episode.

Maxine: I don't think my actions were as terrible as you guys make it out to be. Asslie stole my things and then pulled out my discreet extensions. She just couldn't go unpunished for her childish behavior. As the bible says, an eye for an eye, a weave for a weave.



Emily

Monica Krawiec
photography



The Taxi on 32nd

James Baker
photography

The Fractal Cashier Blues

Monica Archer

With a flick of the wrist, items pass hand to hand.
You hear a beep, and place what you've scanned
into a bag. "Would you like paper or plastic, ma'am?"
"Paper for the canned goods, plastic for the ham."

You ask, "How are you?" a dozen times a minute.
You get a cold, "Fine." You know their heart's not in it.
People whine as they empty their carts of pricey food.
Aren't you lucky to hear about their bad moods?

Hours upon hours, you follow the same exact routines.
There so long you know 4066 is the code for green beans
without even being asked, it's just there in your head.
You wish you were somewhere else, preferably your bed.

The lines peter out, the crowds begin thinning,
As the last hour approaches you can't help your grinning.
When you're finally done, you feel at peace, you feel zen,
But you know the very next day, it all starts again.

Cuboid

Sean Johnston

How many thoughts flutter past
In the time it takes for the chest
To expand and retract?
A million crawling syllables
Form packs and charge their destination.
By dumb luck and repetition,
A predilection for what is to come to be
At most a degree from what has been,
Teeth part and electrical impulses
Transform into waves who first disturb
The very air that birthed them,
Then crest at eardrums and either crash
Six times or dissipate off in the distance.

But these waves,
Unlike their oceanic counterparts,
Are a bastardization.
The plight of hand-wringing
Dendrites and axons that
Honestly have seen better days
Goes unnoticed as gums smack
In sorrow or laughter.
The real joke, however,
Lies not in the gaps, but

The mass between synapse and chat.

The plot is lost: buried in plaque

From all that smoke.



Politifight

Daniel R. Hilton
adobe photoshop

Sand Dollars

Colleen Calello

Danny Verruca pushed the cap of Banana Boat sunscreen open and held the half-empty wrinkled tube over his pale protruding belly. Meaty fingers overlapped as they worked the tube, eventually resulting in the splat of a mayonnaise-covered drop of sunscreen as it landed slightly above Danny's belly button. Dropping the tube onto the cool sand, he began to spread the sunscreen, mixing it with the sweat and black hair of his stomach.

Debbie glanced away from her husband and lowered her sunglasses back onto her head. She was lying on her back, a few feet away from him, on a bright pink beach towel, glistening from head to toe in a bright pink bikini. Her husband sat in a straining beach chair, the weight of his body pushing the blue and white striped fabric far down, till his ass touched the sand. Above him was a beach umbrella that kept him completely shaded from the sun. On the other side of Debbie was their ten-year-old daughter, Olivia, monotonously digging a hole. Danny had forgotten her beach toys at home; he made it up to Olivia by purchasing a small light blue shovel made from cheap plastic that bent under the strain of the wet sand underneath the soft upper layer.

"Deb, do you need to reapply?" Danny stretched one arm out into the sunlight offering his wife sunscreen.

"I use suntan lotion, not sunscreen." The arm receded back into the shade.

"Later we should walk down the beach. Mike was telling me there

was a storm the other week, and it left piles of sand dollars behind. It's really unusual, Deb." Debbie made a noncommittal sound of consent. Olivia's shovel paused in mid scoop.

"Can I go play by the ocean?" Olivia had placed the sandy shovel on Debbie's towel. Debbie flicked it off and smacked the sand away.

"Sure, hon. Dan, watch her." Olivia zig zagged through the menagerie of beachgoers toward the water.

Danny, supposed to be watching Olivia playing by the water, was much more focused on the bikini clad twenty-somethings. One particular blonde was luring him into a daydream involving sunscreen and jellyfish until he became so lost in his vision, he fell asleep.

Debbie had her eyes closed under her sunglasses but was aware of everything around her, soaking in the sounds of the beach. The group next to her towel was discussing the pros and cons of beach chairs, someone further down was playing salsa music, kids were squealing, and there was the occasional sharp whistle of the lifeguards. Suddenly, mixed into the hum of the beach, was a sound she was intimately familiar with, a sound she drowned out at home with ear plugs: Danny's snoring.

A sharp slap landed on Danny's knee and his eyes flew open.

"You're supposed to be watching the kid, asshole." Debbie was sitting up on her towel now, legs crossed into a pretzel, sunglasses propped atop her head. Danny rubbed the carrot shaped mark that Debbie's slap left.

"S-s-sorry. I just dozed off."

“Do you even know where our daughter is?”

“She was right down there.” Danny pointed in the general direction of the ocean.

“Oh, right down there? Right down there, Dan? Thanks.” Debbie stood up on her towel and stomped down toward the shore, her feet flinging up sand in the process. Danny remained seated.

Debbie stood close enough to the water to have it reach out and lightly brush her manicured toes, scanning the area.

“Oliva! ... Oliva!” When her child did not reappear, Debbie moved slightly further down the beach and continued calling her name. The idea of losing her little girl had been a thought that always struck panic in Debbie; it was every mother’s nightmare, but now that it seemed to be a reality, Debbie simply felt duty-bound and annoyed at her husband.

“Everything okay, miss?” Debbie felt a large rough hand on her bare shoulder and she turned toward its owner. A grinning young man stood in front of the mom, blonde, tan, and lean, everything you would expect to find in a Floridian spring breaker. Debbie let a smile spread slowly across her face as the cool water lapped at her warm feet.

“My daughter seemed to wander off.”

“Really? Has she been missing long?”

“No. I’m sure I’ll find her fast now that I have a young man like you helping me.” Debbie placed a hand on his bicep.

“It would be my pleasure to help you.”

“Would it now?” Debbie’s hand was still curled around the young man’s arm. She took a step closer to him. In her bikini, Debbie knew she looked good. Her confidence had been built up through the eyes of others: the jealous stares of friends, the lingering eyes of other men, and Danny’s warning stare when those men got too close.

“Maybe she’s back on the sand. We could check over by me.” The young man nodded his head in the direction of a group of young people. Debbie watched them for a moment. There were two young girls sprawled out on beach towels and two young men fawning over them. One was having sunscreen applied to her bare back by a curly-haired college kid. The other erupted in laughter and the teller of the joke smiled proudly. There was not a beach chair or umbrella in sight.

“That’s a good—”

“Deb! Did you find her?” Danny ran up to the pair, breathing heavily. Streaks of unblended sunscreen leaked down his stomach as he panted, placing his hands on his lower back and looking up at the sky.

“Do you see her? No, you don’t. So, no, I did not find her.” Danny caught his breath and looked at his wife, and then the placement of his wife’s hand on the man’s bicep. He took a step closer, sinking into the wet sand near his wife.

“Who are you? A lifeguard? You helping us?”

“Just making sure everything’s alright.”

“Everything’s fine, pal. Thanks.” Danny put his arm around his wife, effectively knocking her arm off the young man, who

simply shrugged and walked away toward his friends.

“What are you doing with that guy? Our daughter is missing and you’re fucking flirting. Gripping his arm like some kind of leech.”

“Like you were doing any better! You just kept your fat ass glued to that chair!” Debbie shoved out of Danny’s grasp.

“You don’t even deny it! Jesus Christ, Deb.”

“Our daughter’s missing and you’re here, mad about who I’m talking to!”

“Exactly! Our daughter is missing and you’re panting after some kid!”

“Olivia!” Debbie ignored him.

“And I wasn’t just sitting there! I told the lifeguards!”
Danny grabbed Debbie’s shoulder and faced her toward the other side of the beach. Several lifeguards could be seen walking the beach, and the distant yell of “Olivia!” reached Debbie’s ears.

“You did something! I’m shocked!”

Debbie and Danny walked down the beach together, calling Olivia’s name, and Debbie’s mind spun around the possibilities of their missing daughter. If the little girl did not show up soon, the police would get involved. There would be long interviews where every detail of the day was gone over: what time the family arrived at the beach, what time did they notice Olivia’s disappearance, how long was she alone, how long did they search, and so on. Questions about Olivia would be asked: what did she look like and what was she wearing, did she know how to swim, was she shy or adventur-

ous, did the ocean scare her, would she talk to strangers, and so on. Debbie and Danny would wait at the police station, eventually being sent back to their hotel room after hours of not hearing anything. Debbie would stare at the phone waiting, teary-eyed. And maybe Olivia would be found. Maybe she simply wandered off the beach. Maybe she was kidnapped but the police would toil away and eventually find her, reuniting the happy family. Or Olivia might never return to the family. Maybe her small, bloated body would wash up on the shore, found by a morning jogger and her yellow Labrador retriever. Maybe she would simply be lost forever, leaving Danny and Debbie in a fluctuating state of hope and resignation.

“If we don’t find our daughter, I’m filing for divorce.”

“You’re fucked up, Deb.”

“You know I only stay with you for her sake.”

“Olivia!”

“I mean, you’ve lost everything good in my life. Now you lost our fucking daughter. What else is new?”

“Olivia!”

“You lost track of your health. Fine. The sex sucks but fine.”

“Olivia!”

“You lost the dog when you forgot to lock the gate. Fine. He was your idea anyway.”

“Olivia!”

“You showed up to work either drunk or hungover for too long. You lost your job. Fine. We’re struggling, but I support us.”

“Olivia!”

“You lost the money your uncle left you in his will by booking this stupid fucking vacation. Fine. I like the beach.”

“Olivia!”

“But now you fucking lost your own daughter! You’ll probably lose your balls next.” Danny stopped short and turned to Debbie and raised a hand as if to slap her. She flinched back, like a little boy running from the waves. Danny shook his head and lowered his hand.

“Let’s just find our daughter.” The couple continued along the beach.

Olivia had been missing for an hour now, and the lifeguards all along the beach were on full alert, scouring the beach both on foot and from their towers. Two police officers had arrived and were assisting in the search.

“Shouldn’t there be more of you? And shouldn’t you be evacuating the beach?”

“Sir, this is fairly routine. Unwatched kids wander off all the time. It’s a big beach. We’ll find her.” Danny was not one to argue with authority; the search continued.

As the beach began to empty of people, it became much easier to see down the shoreline. Debbie and Danny were reaching an area of the shore that was rougher than others, leaving it unpopulated; beachgoers were discouraged from entering the water in

this area due to large jutting rocks that often broke off under the pressure of the current.

“Shit!” Debbie quickly raised her foot off the sand and grabbed the sandy sole of her now prune-like foot. “I stepped on something.” A trickle of blood blossomed out of the heel of Debbie’s foot. On the ground was a jagged piece of a broken sand dollar.

“Watch where you’re walking.”

“I’m watching for our daughter.” As Danny and Debbie headed further down the beach, the broken sand dollars become more populous. The couple walked carefully, dodging the sharp-edged land mines, still calling Olivia’s name.

“I thought you could only find these in the morning?”

“I told you what Mike said. There’s an abnormal amount of these bastards.” Danny reached down, grabbed a handful, and threw them into the ocean. They washed right back up with the waves.

“Maybe we should head back and get shoes.”

“Probably. And meet back up with those officers.”

However, the couple continued walking down the beach, calling Olivia’s name. When the sand dollars were at their heaviest, Danny found a small blue plastic shovel. He reached down and picked it up, holding it between himself and his wife. They argued that there were hundreds of kids on the beach today; the shovel could belong to any of them. But Danny did not place it back onto the sand; he held onto it, and Debbie and Danny continued down the beach.

Not long after discovering the blue shovel, Debbie spotted a patch of pink only a few meters away.

“Olivia!” Debbie took off running toward the patch of pink, the same pink as her own bikini. Her bare feet crunched over the scattered sand dollars, tiny cuts opening over the expanse of the bottom of her foot. Slowly, the pink took the form of a little stringy-haired blonde girl, face down in the sand. Debbie reached the girl and went down onto her knees, sinking into the wet sand. She grabbed the girl by the shoulder and pushed her onto her back. Debbie rubbed the thick layer of sand off the girl’s face, revealing Oliva. The water rushed up with greedy fingers, traveling well past Olivia’s head and sinking the pair further into the sand. As the water receded, Debbie noticed that it ran red. She cradled her hand under Olivia’s head, and then withdrew, fingers wet with blood. She sought a pulse and found none.

“Ol-Ol-Oliva!” Danny had finally reached them, panting. He collapsed down onto his knees next to his wife.

“She’s dead, Dan. Our daughter is dead.” Debbie let a sob escape. Danny grabbed their daughter’s waterlogged body and pulled it into his lap, his body convulsing with sobs and heavy breathing.

Debbie stared at her grief-stricken husband and lifeless daughter. She reached out to hold the hand of her daughter but found it was curled tightly around an intact sand dollar. She pried the stiff fingers open and pulled the sand dollar out, cradling it in her own hands.

“You know these things aren’t regular sea shells, Dan? They’re skeletons; they were alive once. The life gets sucked out of them by prey, and we collect their corpses.” Danny continued to sob. Debbie’s hand curled around the sand dollar and it broke, cutting into the palm of her hand.



Perfection in Reflection

Walt Brandt
acrylic paint on canvss



Untitled

J.A. Salimbene
photography

Gateway to the Soul

Lauren Semler

I peer into the mirror and see a woman staring back.

She looks at me inquisitively
as if asking why I look so sad.

From behind the glass,
she is powerless
to say

what is really on her mind,
for there is no way.

She can only nod as I do
and mouth words on my lips,
unable to provide the solace

I know she wants to give.

She is the only one to go to
when I am about to break.

She sees but never pities,
never tells a single soul
about my guarded vulnerability.

She shares with me a secret,
one I never would have known.

As I stare at her, broken,

sh

a

t

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e

r

ed,

her eyes pull me

back into focus.

The brown depths

show me my inner truths.

Inside I see my pain

and the underlying anger.

As I look deeper, I see a glimmer

of something dull,

but profound.

Strength

emanating from hope

I never knew

I had.

“Lovliest of Trees, the [Bonsai] Now”

After A. E. Howman

Caroline Nelson

The Japanese maple with its ambitious reach,
pruned and prodded into deep submission.
Its crown dethroned,
its leaves thinned with small steel shears,
ensuring they grow back with voluptuous appeal.
The sapling wisteria wound tightly in copper wires,
incarcerated in an anomalous bow.
Its violet tear drops sway above its terracotta pot
while its small green buds sleepily blink open.
The ostensibly modest magnolia stellate,
dressed for March in opulent white blooms,
flourishes root-over-rock,
provocatively betraying an intrinsic pearl.
And last the Chinese elm, as always, charismatic,
with its charming asymmetrical grin,
takes in grafted branches under its canopy.
Veins spliced with the sharptooth saw and sutured with
rosin, beeswax, and tallow:
a wax seal tourniquet.
The scion and the rootstock coalesce
and intimately cradle each other's inner cambiums.
With time, the tree takes the branch
into its heartwood.

Vitamin D/Cruelty

Sean Johnston

By thought tethered and tongue pinned,
Stripped under gaze and not bare,
Between statements the abstraction slips,
Grinning implicit,
Intent on suspension.

Alone reflecting stillness when,
Uprooted by motion,
A naïve mirror chips itself
In hopes its silver backing
Finds a rightful observer:
Other and golden.

Mind that moss is not northbound,
But married to bark spine and
Faced in spectation,
Rejecting rays and,
At times, unkindly so.

But the nature of nature is movement,
Told by clutches, swings, jolts, and misses.
Students of gesture contrast cracks,
Marveling at limbs,
Forgetting fruit.

Contributors' Notes

Stephanie Smith is a graduating senior. In between drowning in papers and hours of reading, this English major floats to the surface every few days to get a gasp of sweet, sweet air only found in technological bliss. She's that person who's been sending you weekly emails intimidating you with deadlines since the fall. Could this magazine have been this successful without her? Probably not. Gosh, that Stephanie Smith is such a humble person.

Kat Shanks is cool and likes anime. Also I am gay.

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!

Kevin J. Ha is a graduate student at Montclair State University studying sociology. He is currently in his gap year before applying to PhD programs in the NJ/NYC area in hopes of studying immigration and race identity among second-generation immigrants. In his free time, Kevin writes music and poetry, and he sketches. He draws inspiration from many Enlightenment poets, as well as modern poets who write about the experiences of people of color in the United States.

Kristy Lim's name backwards is Mil Ytsirk. She imagines that a ytsirk would be an exotic yellow bird. And mil is short for million. Are these signs that Kristy will morph into a wealthy yellow bird one day? Cross your fingers.

Monica Archer is an English major who watches *The Corny Collins Show* and does absolutely nothing else. She aspires to be

the next Tina Fey, but will probably wind up being the next Liz Lemon. Monica lives in a town the size of a postage stamp, and her main goal is to be one of the “notable people” on her town’s Wikipedia page. Monica loves reading, writing, *Gilmore Girls*, and showtunes. She doesn’t go out much.

Anijeh Green is a junior English major with a minor in wishing she had her degree already. She is leaning heavily toward teaching, but 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.

Lauren Semler is an English major who loves all things pertaining to theatre and food. Despite the glaring oversight during her youth, she hopes to be a professor at Hogwarts in the future. If not, a Muggle high school English teacher will suffice. She loves to read, spend time with friends and family, binge-watch TV shows, and eat lots of good food.

“Make me good, God, I’m ready.” - **Brygida Dabek**

Jessica D’Onofrio would like you to know that she really, really loves bees.

James Barker is a photographer and filmmaker with his life revolving around the camera. Nothing suits him quite like putting on some music (preferably Frank Ocean) and wandering around NYC, discovering little moments of life that he can share with the world. @barkernotbaker

Julia Williams prefers to be called Nilus. She is a senior here at Montclair State University. Her goals and aspirations are to be a children’s book writer and illustrator. She wants to make a short series of bilingual children’s books teaching kids language through

play. Their first book is a Japanese-English book that is 32 pages long and it is going to be the focus of their senior project! Once she graduates she would like to apply for the JET program to travel abroad to Japan to teach English to Japanese students for a few years. Afterwards, she is determined to make two more books, one in Arabic and one in Spanish and travel to Dubai, Jordan, Argentina, and Peru for cultural inspiration. As for now, she is working on getting her BFA in Animation and Illustration. Thank you, the reader, for taking time to read her bio.

With *DANIMATION*, artist ***Daniel R. Hilton*** brings the world a brand new wacky wave of original artwork, cartoons, illustration, comics, and fan art! The idea is simple - to make cartoons great again by presenting outrageous, larger than life content, characters, worlds, and stories. The Work of Dan sees lots of current events being parodied, and often casts them in a completely new loony light. Tonally tossed somewhere between *South Park* and *Borat*, Danimation topics range from the politically dire to slice-of-life silly. Since there's always a story to tell, we keep on truckin' with lots of new ideas always popping up, and a mission to entertain and educate in the most profound, colorful ways imaginable. Join in on the ridiculousness!

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.

Stephanie Castiglia is a freshman at Montclair State University and a business major. She leads a double life of being a college student on the weekdays and being an Acme cashier on the weekends. Stephanie is also a Disney nerd and shows up to *TNR* meetings with full cups of lemonade.

Ashley Altieri is a junior at Montclair State University, majoring in Psychology and English and minoring in Myth Studies. She enjoys coffee and good times and owns one too many graphic tees (they're mostly Disney, please let her be).

Kyle Coan "Cards on the table, Frank, did you kill my boy?" - Burt Chance

Michael Telewiak is a senior animation/illustration major at Montclair State University. Michael hopes to freelance and design in the editorial field once he graduates. You can follow him and his work on Instagram at @telewiakstudio.

Kevin Farrell is a junior at Montclair State University studying English. He was deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 and Guantanamo Bay in 2015 as a Military Police Officer with the New Jersey Army National Guard. He has been published in *The New York Times*' Modern Love column and in Cornell University's literary magazine, *Epoch*. Another one of his short stories will be featured in the Fall 2017 issue of *Epoch*.

Christopher Schneider: I am a 23-year-old film major and creative writing minor, bartender and trivia host by day, and stressed undergrad by night.

Gil Moreno is a senior at Montclair State University. He intends to prepare for his GRE this summer and plans to enroll in an MFA program for Fall 2018. If he were at a podium, he would like say, "Thank you to all my professors for their dedication and making this older student not feel like a fish in the wrong pond. I'm proud to be attending a university that invests great care in their diversity."

J.A. Salimbene is a junior at Montclair State University studying filmmaking and creative writing. His poetry has previously been published by *Modern Poets Magazine* in New York and many of his restaurant reviews can be found in *The Montclair Dispatch*. With passions for words, food, love, and life, he finds himself exploring the blank page to help balance his unhealthy obsession with his own relevance to the universe and the world around him. Otherwise, he can usually be found at Trend Coffee and Tea House on Bloomfield Avenue.

Monica Krawiec is an undeclared freshman in university attempting to better her time-management skills and adapt to the life God has decided to give her. Artists pluck the strings of the universe!

Caroline Nelson has been described by her high school crush as “the Girl Scouts’ poster child.” Five years later she has made her debut in a Girl Scouts promotional video. She wants to let him know that she is living the dream.

Evan A. Johnson is a film and creative writing student here at MSU. Screenwriting, photography, and filmmaking are his biggest interests right now. Grilled cheese is his favorite food (use mayo instead of butter) and his favorite season is this one (spring). Check out his new Instagram, [ev_j0hns0n](#), where he’ll be posting original work like the one included in this magazine.

Shivani Kapadia is a junior here at Montclair State University. She is studying toward becoming an elementary school teacher. Her passion has always been for the arts and crafts as it allows her to explore their creative side without any boundaries.

Walt Gabriel Brandt: Full Throttle Movement. Walt Gabriel Brandt is a 21-year-old MSU student studying the liberal arts. Over the past year they have dedicated themselves to the arts by illustrating their thoughts and opinions on life through very traditional

art mediums, such as paint and pen. Their art expresses an exploration of the human condition either exposed and naked or shaded and hidden away. Art, for Walt, is a language created within itself and at some point in its creation, when he ceases to control it, it starts out with intention but at some point goes full throttle free-style-just like life. Giving up control is a lesson in humility in his work, as an artist, and in his life. For personal/commissioned work please visit his Instagram page: [@waltgabriel.art](#) or his website: [www.waltgabriel.com](#). He'd be more than happy to work with you!

Samantha Smith started drawing when she was really young. As she got older, Samantha realized that she wanted to continue pursuing art. Living without art wasn't an option. It gets hard to draw for fun during the school year and when life gets really busy. But she thinks it's really important to try your best to keep up with it, even if it's a quick sketch. It's worth it.

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.

Notes

