

By Lisa Langford

NEEDRA SIDE

Edited to be read as a monologue from page 42

NEEDRA

I had this rat, when I was first starting my research? Roxy. She was beautiful—shiny fur, long, smooth tail—

She was! She was special. To me, at least. And when the experiment started, we put magnolia blossoms next to her cage—she loved the smell of magnolias. Roxy'd grind her teeth, and her eyes would bulge out—

The happiest. It meant she felt safe, and happy, and loved. Then we started shocking Roxy whenever the magnolia blossoms were around. A mild shock, to the feet. But it might as well have been a thousand volts; she was terrified. She didn't know what it was. She didn't know why it was happening. She just knew when she smelled magnolia blossoms...life didn't make any sense. She had a litter, they grew up. We never shocked them, they'd never even been near the flower, but the first time we let them smell that scent they were terrified. And their children. And their children. (Beat.) I see kids today, with sneakers on their feet and cell phones in their hands that cost more than their ancestors were sold for, and I think, *what* have you got to be afraid of? Then I see them scatter when the police drive by and tense up when a teacher calls their name...and I get it. I get it. It took me four generations to finally figure out how to turn that fear off in a rat. So I could put a magnolia blossom in their cage and hear them purr instead of watch them cower...