

ATLANTIS

a creative magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Thank you for reading our eighty-fourth issue of *Atlantis: A Creative Magazine*. This issue is unusual for a number of reasons, the least of which being the circumstances in which it was produced: amidst the ongoing fight for racial justice and equality in our communities, as well as the pandemic that is still changing the shapes of our lives. On a personal note, as I'm sure other creative souls will understand, an unexpected side-effect of these circumstances has been a shift in my motivation—a struggle to find inspiration to continue creating, to generate art in such demanding and abnormal times. When our focus is pulled in so many other directions, it can be hard to force ourselves work in the same ways we usually do—in effect, to pretend that nothing is wrong—and in fact, to do so can even be harmful.

Because of this, throughout the past few months I have found myself wandering down different creative avenues, finding inspiration in the abnormal and the disruptive, instead of attempting to resist them. In times so far removed from those that we once lived in, the ability to adapt is essential. That this issue exists speaks to that same quality: the fluidity of the creative act. And a glance inside its pages will show you a sampling of the forms that art can take when its creators embody that fluidity, as perspectives and structures and positions in time shift; as our contributors embody snails and rivers, delve into the cracks in their ceilings, and open hidden eyes.

This summer has been a long and difficult one, and I am infinitely grateful to our wonderful contributors, and especially to my extraordinary staff members, for seeing this issue into your hands. As you move through its pages, please take a moment to appreciate those that made it possible, their creativity, devotion, and above all, their fluidity. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Vasilios Moschouris

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cracks in the ceiling

Fiction by Abigail Miles

A crack lives on my bathroom ceiling, and it has an annoying habit of pulling me into it, then spitting me out in places that I don't remember leaving.

•

The crack transported me for the first time two months ago. It happened when I was lathering my hair in the shower, speculating about the feasibility of placing my script on top of my forehead in the hope that the lines would absorb into my brain via osmosis. I looked up through the steam and noticed it. My initial thought had been to blame the neighbors above us and their footsteps which at times sounded like tap dancing baby elephants. My second thought was that the crack seemed to be widening—definitely not a good sign—and it was also possibly glowing around the edges, though that admittedly could have just been mold. While I attempted to decide if it was glowing or moldy, it became apparent to me that I was no longer in my shower. Instead, I found myself in a room surrounded by very small children.

Except then I perceived that I myself was also a very small child—a realization that should not have been strange, I thought a moment later, because I couldn't remember in that instant ever having been anything else. I gazed around at the other second graders that encircled me, and realized that one of the children—a boy—was talking to me.

"Hey Marcy, you fat, ugly cow."

Yes that is me, I thought, now fully coming into myself. The fat, ugly cow.

"Are you gonna say your line or aren't ya?" he sneered at me.

I glanced down. And oh yes, we were doing a play—my breakout role, as it was. I played the enchanted penguin, so I mustered all of the flippered confidence I could and took a step forward.

"Oh, if only I could fly," I said, "I would ditch this popsicle stand in favor of a proper meal in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

That was it, my moment in the spotlight, and I stepped

back again to let the detective cactus reclaim his role in center stage. As I retreated to the back of the room, I discerned that I was peculiarly wet, and also naked, and apparently standing again on the slick floor of my shower as the piping hot water continued to rain down over top of me.

It took me an hour to remember I wasn't eight years old and that I was in my own apartment. When my boyfriend came home, he found me huddled in a ball, shaking and mumbling about how Timmy Spence didn't know anything about the stresses of learning magic when you couldn't even properly hold a wand with your flipper.

It happened again last week. I was having a bad day as a result of some kind of quarter life crisis and had decided to take a bath for once. The steam was doing that thing where it drags you under and makes you start to think you might be hallucinating the tiniest bit. That was when I glanced up and caught sight of the crack again. I had almost entirely forgotten about it, which should have been odd because of how often I'm in that room. An entire minute passed while I struggled to recall that this wasn't the first time the crack had appeared.

The crack expanded again above me like a mouth preparing to swallow its prey whole. I noted distantly that the edges definitely glowed this time, and then I was gone. It was jarring to be on my feet, as opposed to lying down in the tub. Why that should have been odd immediately escaped me, and while I stood there trying to figure it out, a woman approached me, a bright smile on her face.

"Miss Donoghue. It's such a pleasure to have you here," she said.

Right. The pleasure of prostrating myself in front of hundreds. How could I have forgotten?

"Yeah," I said to the woman whose name I thought I'd remembered to be Nancy. "Be there in a sec."

This is where I wanted nothing more than to run away, though. They wanted me in their classroom to tell them

how I'd done it, how I'd made it in the industry that so many would kill to get a moment in, but I didn't have any answers for them. I auditioned, and apparently some people like tense and awkward when it comes to their actors; some people like the aesthetic of performers who can't act and who so clearly only stumbled onto the stage by sheer accident, but I couldn't exactly say that to an entire class worth of want-to-bes. I couldn't say that I had less than zero clues as to how I had ended up there.

Before I had to endure the mental back and forth of deciding whether to lie or to share the unfortunate truth, I was back in the tub, shriveled like a Craisin, and trembling both from the near miss and the water that had gone cold at least half an hour prior. Though it hadn't exactly been a near miss, I mused, and reflected on the frown the professor had given me two weeks ago when she had politely asked me to leave. It turns out colleges look down on visitors claiming that the key to life is winging it and hoping for the best to a room full of adolescents.

•

Now I'm in the shower, listening to the rain as it pounds against the side of the building, pondering the likelihood of our complex losing power. The lights flicker once mid-shampooing, and I think to myself, oh yes, this is how I go. A moment later the lights come back on and all is well, until my eyes turn toward the ceiling, and I see that blasted crack again.

I think about leaving the shower in favor of bed, fleeing so as to not be ensnared by the crack once more, but I haven't even turned off the faucet when that horrible glowing starts, and I recognize that it's too late, then question an instant later what it's too late for.

Well, it's too late for my relationship, it seems, as Matthew has been yelling a steady stream of curses at me for the better half of an hour—mostly about my lies and my truths and the fact that I've told him I'm not entirely sure what it is I want to do anymore and have quit my job. Apparently,

that is not the right thing to say to your partner when you've been planning on settling down for some time. And in the midst of all that, I only briefly wonder how I had managed to space out in the middle of so much screaming and angst.

"You're a stupid cow, and you've got no clue" he's saying now. "I can't believe I wasted my time with you. You need to grow up, you fat, ugly cow."

I get a horrible flashback to that time in second grade, but before I can dwell on it for too long, he has already marched his way back into the bedroom, grabbed a bag that was apparently already packed, and departed from the apartment with an extravagant slam of the door.

This is when the tears are supposed to come, I think. Why aren't there any tears? I know there are supposed to be some, I remember it, but I don't, but I do, and why aren't there any tears?

I do fall to the ground. I do twist my hands through my hair and consider fleetingly whether the pain of doing a job I'm no good at and that has never wanted me would have been worth this relationship that I can already feel fading in my mind, dulling into a used-to-be rather than a could-be. I'm begging the tears to come, to make me feel an ounce more normal in that moment, but they won't, and there has to be a reason, but I can't come to it. I can't, and what is it? Why won't they come?

I'm still on the ground trying to force the tears that have rebelled against me when everything goes dark and cold, and my first thought is that I've wound up in some kind of hellscape, which maybe would serve me right for the lack of tears, and that maybe that's where the crack has actually been bringing me all this time. Then a loud crash resounds around the bathroom, and I recognize that it is indeed still my bathroom, only the shower has turned icy, and the lights have all gone out. The crash sounds again, but this time I understand it to be thunder, and the pounding of my heart begins to calm marginally. I can't see the crack anymore—I can't see much of anything—and for some reason, I feel as though it might even be gone. That it might be done with me, moved on to some new chump to pester and torment until death do us part. Maybe it's gone, I think hopefully, desperately to myself.

But then again, maybe it's not.

Probably not.



At the End of This Expansive Terrain

Nonfiction by Liza Bencheikh

I spend many evenings walking a narrow path forked off of a popular hiking trail. Almost no one comes this way. Most people prefer the lush winding verdure of the main trail.

My path is exceedingly dull by comparison. It's flat, and the greyness of the thorny shrub thickets is only accentuated by the overcast sky. Still, the seclusion here is worth much more to me than the rich forestry. I'm not sure how long this path is, or where exactly it leads to. I've never trekked it in its entirety before—only enough to slip through the claws of the beast I leave behind me. I usually circle around once I reach the decaying tree stump about a mile or so in. But today, I don't. I have no plan of ever turning back.

I push on deeper into the belly of this torrid landscape. I tell myself that somewhere up ahead are green rolling hills—where I can lay my jacket beside a patch of wild dandelions and watch golden sunset highlight the gentle slopes. But that is still a ways ahead, at the end of this expansive terrain—or, so I tell myself.

The path is made out of compacted dirt with a top layer of dust and gravel that rattles underneath my footsteps. I like the sound—it makes me feel powerful. I stomp a little harder and imagine the earth moving beneath my feet. If anything, I must've scared away any coyotes that may have been lurking. There was a warning sign about a recent sighting posted on a stake at the entrance of the path. But that isn't the creature that I'm concerned about. I've never seen a coyote here before. They prefer to nest and hunt on the main trail. Too many thorns here.

That's probably why I've already spotted half a dozen wide-eyed, wild rabbits emerge from the brush. They stand there, in the middle of the path, almost defiantly, as if they know they shouldn't be there. Maybe they know the thorns will protect them from predators. But still, I can't help but wonder if that little rattling sound of their paws against the ground makes them feel strong

too—so they stand their ground—against a coyote who will never come.

•

I stop walking. I find the strength to stand my ground as well. I turn around to face my own beast, with red shingled houses that glisten like blood between the white teeth of the cul-de-sac streets. I see how far I've come. Those suburbs are far behind me. I can only see the faint outline of palm trees like the rattle of a fussy child who's afraid to be left alone.

•

Perhaps at the end of this trail, there is no sunset falling on rolling hills that awaits me, and perhaps my footsteps don't move the earth any more than a rabbit's step would. But perhaps the thought is quite enough.

•

And it is, quite enough.

‡



Starburst

Photography by Rilee Knott

None of This Is Real

Poetry by Emmi Conner

Suppose this is all you want,
all you ever wanted.

Suppose we wake up tomorrow,
sleep still heavy in our eyes.
You are three years younger, and I am
myself. And we do it again.

Suppose we get it right this time.

Suppose your mother does not
hate me, and I don't hate
myself. And your father never stares
at my fingertips, trying not to know who they hold.

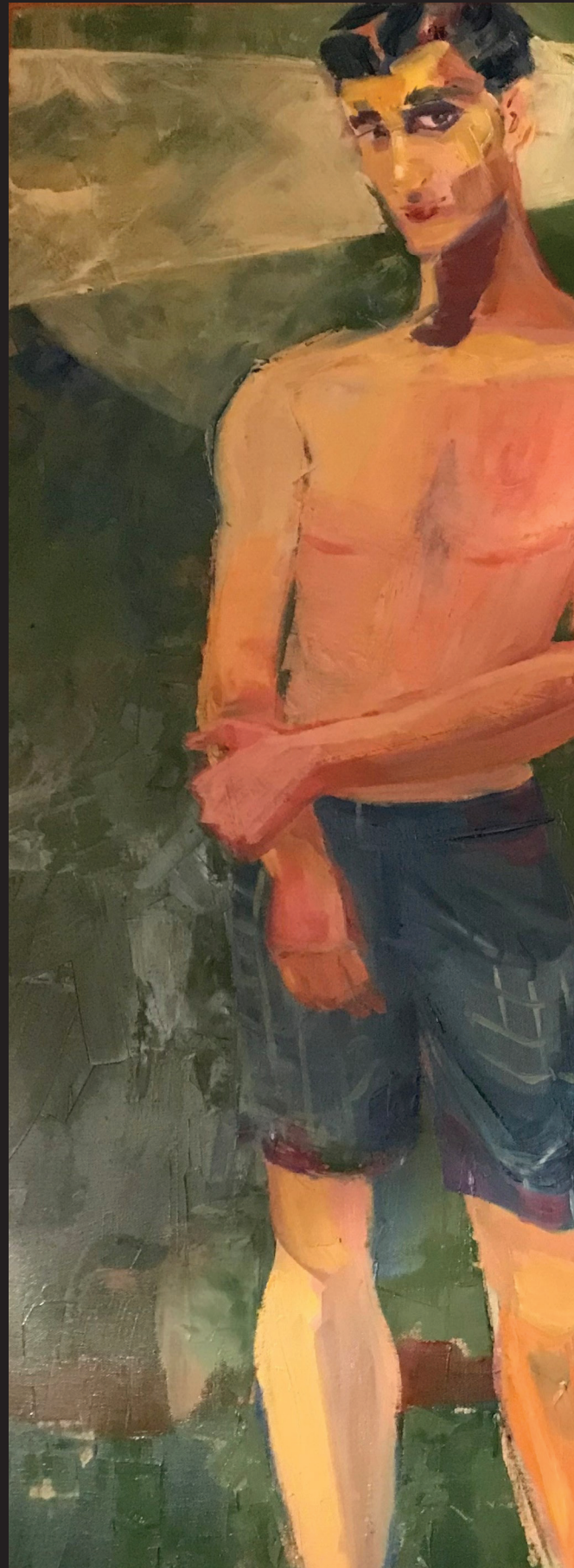
Suppose the oceans refuse to stop
at their shores. Instead, they rush to meet us
where we stand, where we wait for them, empty,
ready to bubble over with salt and with sea.

Suppose I am stronger this time.
I am Hickory, White Oak. I do not sway
with the wind. I am not blown over
by the breeze, and I am not cracked
through my middle by the storm.

Suppose history means nothing to you.
It is men between pages,
and it is maps that always change.
It is never truth or reality or fact.

Suppose none of this is real.

Suppose I no longer want it to be.





The Outsider

Art by Loraine Scalamoni

Your Aunt Gets High & Gives You a Ride in Her 1998 Ford Taurus

Fiction by Zoë Däe

I would argue for months that Aunt Dawn had been straight. It was the truck's fault. The trailer was disengaged from the cab and crossed the double yellow. I had seen her shift her granddaughter to her other hip to lean over and snort a crushed up OxyContin approximately seventy-eight times, but she would never drive while fucked up. Not with us in the car: her five-year-old daughter, toddler granddaughter, and her niece—the daughter of her baby brother who somehow had his shit together better than her, who looked her in the eyes for a second too long before letting her leave the driveway with his only child.

The accident happened when I was fifteen, before I knew that when you're addicted to pills, you're fucked up all the time. When your top hobby is snorting pills, if you're not hugging the toilet, you're high. They're not a very forgiving drug. You have the shortest grace period between a high and a withdrawal. They're worse than heroin in that respect, but the high is only half as good. I didn't get why Dawn couldn't just quit like my dad and stepmom had. Wasn't it easy?

Don't you just get tired of hiding in your bedroom and trying to evenly split a shard of a Roxy that you stole from your senile grandmother, while the three kids you have between you watch Nick at Nite in the living room and have no idea what you're doing or why you fight so damn much? Dad and Marie got tired, so they go to the clinic and got the drugs from a doctor and only take their dosage down a fraction a year, but at least they're not going to accidentally buy something off an undercover cop or die on the toilet with half a Hardees straw up their noses like Barry Caldwell did in 2006.

I didn't let myself be angry with Dawn. She was dead after all, and you can't stay mad at the dead. I was mad at Dad and Marie. Marie dropped Dawn off at a house on Garfield Street and babysat Little Lou every weekday, and she still let me get in a car with her.

My dad had just threatened to call child services on Dawn when he saw her two-year-old granddaughter, Genie, trying to cut up her Fun Dip on the coffee table, and he still let me get in the car with her.

I was even mad at the girls. Little Lou, didn't you see what Mommy did before she put you in the car? Genie, why couldn't you stay with your own mom for just one night? You are your grandmother's shadow, following her everywhere, an exact copy of her except that you are shorter and darker, distorted by the light. You were still mistakenly calling her Mama instead of Mimi, and your actual mother was still trying to laugh it off. Genie, do you think I enjoyed fumbling with your car seat strap, my fingers cold and stiff, trying to decipher the button from your puffy coat in the dark because I thought the car was still in the road and we'd be hit again at any second? Little Lou, do you think I liked telling you to be brave and leaving you in your seat once I realized the car was rested in someone's yard and not on the highway?

Every day I think of at least one thing I should have done differently, and most of the time, that thing is something I did wrong with you girls. I shouldn't have moved Genie because she could have been injured. I should have made sure Lou's door opened before leaving her alone for the first responders to bust her window open and get glass in her hair because I wasn't there. No matter how many therapists tell me, "It's fine," "You did your best," "Next time you will do differently," "Remember that the girls made it out okay and that's what matters," I will never be able to escape the little details, every move and half-move I should or should not have made.

It would have been easier if it had just been Dawn and me: looking over to the driver's seat and seeing her face smashed into the steering wheel, her blonde hair—naturally light but brassy from all the toxins

in her body—bloomed over everything so I couldn't see the blood, her lack of features, not having to pray before turning around because there are two little girls in the backseat who aren't crying because they're probably dead. I wouldn't have fallen down the muddy hill with Genie in my arms, had my humiliation doubled by banging on a door and crying to no answer with dirty jeans. I might have been able to tell the 911 operator where we were instead of suddenly forgetting every street name in the city I'd lived in my whole life and having to hand my cell to the trucker who I was still convinced was entirely at fault for the accident.

But you were both there, sitting shocked but safe in the ruins of two disintegrated car seats. I had to leave Lou in the car on her own because I couldn't carry you both, and I fell down the muddy hill with Genie in my arms. I was beating on the door and begging for someone to answer when the homeowners turned their living room light off. I turned around and Dawn was awake, head up, hands flailing, yelping and honking the horn, looking like she was about to chew her shattered leg off to get out of the car. And Little Lou had to see and hear it all from the backseat. I had to feel the relief that Dawn was alive, that Lou wouldn't remember this at all because she would just be happy to have her mommy be safe and well after the doctors fixed her, only for my aunt to die in the helicopter.

The tox screen results weren't released out of respect for our family. The truck wasn't damaged, and the trucker said to forget it, no point in turning it in to insurance. Then he showed up at the funeral like he wanted us to thank him or something. We didn't know he had even been there until the local paper ran a story on it.

“Local truck driver attends funeral of woman who died in collision with him while under the influence, does not ask for compensation from crash.”

Some people really have nothing better to do, nothing nice to say.





Crock Pot

Poetry by Joe Bowling

I speak to my grandma over soup. The soup she raised me on, with the okra and diced tomatoes. The large chunks of Idaho gold potatoes. I remove the lid and the steam rises from the pot. I close my eyes and it opens the pores on my face. It smells of onions and garlic. The soup reminds me of home.

We talk about what's new in my life. She always asks the same questions. Do I have a girlfriend? When will I give her a grandchild? She tells me she loves me, and I get that fuzzy feeling in my chest.

The ceramic bowl is hot in my hand. I have to blow on every bite. The deep crimson of the broth reminds me that I'm alive. That we should be aware of what we leave behind. I'm reminded that once I go, my kindness can stick around. The effect I had on those I love.

She's the only family I have left.

She's been dead for seven years.

And we speak over soup.



Ohio

Poetry by Camryn Myers

I thought about you today.

My thoughts keep you here,
persistent and loud and alive—
though you remain a figment of strawberry perfume
that unsettles my most sedentary atoms
and creeps up on me as if you're in this very room.

You belong to cracks of tiles,
in writings on neon signs,
and vibrations from overheard whispers.

Half a thousand miles away,
you interrupt the setting of stone
and break bridges meant to last alone.



At Point Blank Range

Photography James E. Sharpe III "Trey"



I Want to Be a Snail

Poetry by Jules Miller

Slick. Cylindrical. One muscle.
I want to be a snail.
Always carrying a home to hide in.
A whorl.
Something that can readily defy an attempt to kill.

The only thing that could shrivel me, a mineral
miniscule
and even more shapeless than I.
My primitive eyestalks could not detect it
as I slide on my silver-laced trail
so it is my fault if we both dissolve.
My tubular body, an open wound to season.
Helix escargot.

Ah, to be a snail!
Uncategorizable and jellied—
something you can hold in your hand.
Something you can peer at
and wonder in silence about its dichotomy.
But like most small and dirt-covered things
you call me a boy.
There he goes, you say.
You set me down.

I do not say anything.

I did not have to.



Nathan: The BHI Pirate Artist

Art by Loraine Scalamoni



Chalazae

Nonfiction by Evan Seay

Two scrambled eggs. No salt, no pepper, no cheese. Not even a few potatoes or a spoonful of grits on the side. Just eggs on a plate, my five-year-old self, and my Nonnie, my grandmother. I poked around the plate and nibbled on the lump of yellow for an hour until it was all gone.

"You're doing so *good*," Nonnie said.

She took my plate and washed it and the pan she used to cook the eggs. I pulled a towel from the oven handle, and she told me she'd just let everything air dry.

The IV bag, high up on a metal hook, slowly dripped through the plastic tubing and into my arm as I sat in the living room and did a crossword puzzle with Nonnie. We sat on the couch by the window, and she told me the clues.

"Number three across," she said. "Four letters: 'In need of Bengay.'"

"What's Bengay?" I asked.

"It's a cream that helps if you're hurting."

"What's the answer?" I ask.

"I don't know," she said. "Why don't *you* take a guess?"

I rolled my head and looked outside. A bright red cardinal on the rhododendron bush twitched his head back and forth. He took off, and the branched bobbed up and down, shaking the dew off the leaves.

"I don't know," I said. "*Hurt* has four letters."

"You're right, but this answer has the letter *e* on the end."

I shifted in my seat and winced: my side hurt more than Bengay could help. Nonnie put the puzzle book down and helped me shift my colostomy bag so I could sit up. She moved my IV stand so it wasn't between us. The sun warmed my face, and I closed my eyes.

She rubbed the back of my hand with the soft, old skin of her hand. Her rings dragged across my skin, and I imagined I wasn't sick until I drifted off to sleep.

•

Lunch was a plain turkey sandwich and a tall glass of orange Gatorade mixed with Miralax. I ate the sandwich

without a sip, even though Nonnie reminded me that I had to drink the Gatorade whether I wanted to or not.

"Your daddy's orders," she said.

I finished my sandwich and sat at the table, staring at the glass while she took the plate to the sink. I took a sip.

"It tastes funny," I said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It's not orange. It just tastes like water."

"I guess the Miralax made the flavor go away," Nonnie said. "You still have to drink it, please. If you don't, your daddy's going to be *very* mad at me."

I gulped and took a deep breath. I couldn't. The only reason to drink Gatorade was for the flavor, and that was gone. I hated it. I took the glass and tried another sip.

"There you go," Nonnie said. "A big drink and you're halfway done."

I closed my eyes and swallowed as much as I could. She was right, halfway there. I set the glass on the table, and we said nothing, me staring at the Gatorade, Nonnie staring at me. It felt like eternity. I finally picked up the courage to try another sip. I tilted my head back and took a big gulp, and when I set the glass down, there was nothing left.

"I am *so* proud of you!" Nonnie said. She kissed my forehead. "*There's* my strong boy. Look at you!" She grinned and took the glass to the sink and washed it and my plate, piling it all in the drainboard with the dishes from breakfast.

I beamed. My mouth tasted powdery and distinctly not-orange, but I was happy. I did something great, for once. Nonnie returned and she suggested we go out on the deck. I shuffled along, leaning on the IV stand with my right hand, Nonnie holding my left.

The wheels of the IV stand bumped on the rough edges of the deck boards, and Nonnie helped me push it over the gaps.

"You're doing so *good*, baby," Nonnie repeated over and over. "I can barely keep up with you, you're going so fast. Are you sure you need my help?"

We walked around the house, me shuffling and wincing with every step, Nonnie following with a smile. We got back to the door, and my colostomy bag was stretching my sweatpants, so we headed back inside.

"You're doing so good. So *brave*."

In the bathroom, Nonnie lifted me up onto the counter, and I sat with my eyes closed while she replaced my colostomy bag.

"You're doing so good," she said. "Look at you. I wish *I* was as strong and as brave as you are."

I didn't feel so brave. I had a bag full of shit hanging off my side. I hated having to wear sweatpants. They didn't fit right on my slight frame. I hated being the only one in my class to wear them. I hated not being able to run and play at recess. I hated having to go to the nurse because I started stinking. I hated when I leaked in the middle of the night and my dad had to get up and change me like I was some little kid, and I had to sleep on a bare mattress because the sheets were in the washer. I hated my Nonnie having to change me even more.

"All done."

She pulled me down off the counter, and I opened my eyes. She was smiling at me. I just stared at her. She saw me. She leaned down and pulled me into a hug.

"I love you, honey," she said.

"I love you, too," I said, the tears pouring out.

•

I make scrambled eggs with salt and pepper. And cheese, potatoes, bacon, a little garlic, some diced onions, mushrooms, and a few green and red peppers. I beat it all together with a bit of milk and pour it into a hot skillet. I delight in the crackle of the cooking eggs. I stand over the stove, folding them over and flipping it until the egg is no longer runny.

The toast pops up just as I'm transferring the omelet onto a plate. I spread a pad of butter on the toast and top the omelet with a pinch of cheese.

"Here you go, Nonnie," I say, placing the plate on the table.

"Oh, honey," she says, "this looks wonderful!"

I beam. "I hope it tastes okay."

She grabs a fork and lets out a soft moan when she takes the first bite.

"This is excellent," she says, a hand covering her mouth. I just smile and nod.

I watch her eat. Her left hand helps her right lift the fork to her mouth. She pulls her coffee mug close to the edge so she can reach it easier. She takes small, slow bites, taking frequent sips of coffee.

When she finishes, I take her plate and put it in the sink. She asks for a glass of orange juice. I wash the dishes while she takes her pills, one by one. I leave everything in the drainboard.

"Can you get my walker, please, honey?" Nonnie asks.

"Of course," I say.

I walk beside her as she shuffles to the living room. I hold her hand as she leans back into her chair, and I stand beside her, chatting. I look back at the picture behind her: it's a portrait of her kids and grandkids. We got it for her for her eightieth birthday. That was a few years back.

"I can't believe it's already been a year," Nonnie says.

I lean on one foot.

"I can't either, Nonnie," I say. I don't know what else to say.

"It seems like yesterday," she says.

It does seem like yesterday, when I drove to the hospital that night, crying then so I wouldn't when I got to my grandpa's room. It seems like yesterday when I walked into the dimly lit room, Nonnie there beside him holding his hand, telling him how *brave* and *strong* he was, how much she *loved* him; how she was *there*, everything was going to be *okay*; how he was going to be *so* happy *so soon*. She never cried once in front of him. Not until he was gone.

She bows her head and crosses her arms. "I just get so lonely sometimes."

"I love you, Nonnie," I say as I bend down to give her a hug.

"I love you too, baby," she says, her rings dragging on my shirt and digging into my back, her tears pouring out.



Spring is Over

Photography Ian Hill



Two Haikus

Poetry by Joshua Aelick

The River

Inky current flows
looping river on the page
I wish I could swim



Fledermaus

Around the lamppost
in dusky summertime flight:
evening acrobats



Rest in Paradise Dylan Rieder

Photography James E. Sharpe III "Trey"





The Conversation

Art by Loraine Scalamoni

Tangential Preoccupations to Vagina Dentata

Nonfiction by Rachel Stempel

I gave my forearm a hickey in tenth grade just to see if I could bite hard enough when the time came. When the time came, I didn't know how to put my teeth away.

My first kiss was with a disgraced firefighter, twenty years my senior, in the dining room of a psychiatric hospital. We had to be fast given where we were, but why his face was coming closer to mine didn't register at the time.

I bit him, and he yelped like a piglet.

He seemed genuinely confused, said he knew I wanted it. I can't say I hadn't thought of it. I liked the attention—from him, and from wheelchair-bound Christopher who wrote homoerotic poetry about me.

I didn't tell anyone right away. I wasn't sure it had happened. But he stopped talking to me after so I knew it must've.

Two opposing teams formed: I was lying and seeking attention versus I was asking for it and seeking attention. Attention-seeking is a clinical diagnosis. Men shouldn't be psychiatrists.

My first kiss was at eighteen—maybe, because I was a late bloomer; maybe, because I was in denial about my sexuality; maybe, because *parts* of any kind, and mine included, grossed me out.

I wrapped the moment up neatly and hid it under the bed to deal with later.

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Out of curiosity, I Google his name. I knew he had anger issues. I didn't know he'd chosen the psych ward over jail time. Even if you're a firefighter, you're not above the law. If you put your trans girlfriend in a chokehold, there are consequences, but your options aren't as limited. The quick search reveals his dating history: mostly trans.

A close friend of mine said a few months back that she could tell since the day she met me I wasn't cis. I wrote a poem once with the line, "The mohel botched my circumcision." In tenth grade, when I was

busy giving my forearm hickeys, I was also busy telling everyone to call me "Gus." Lots to unpack there. Is that why he kissed me? Could he also tell?

I discover he's been on a daytime talk show, crusading for tolerance. He's no longer a firefighter. The fire department promotional items with his face (and body) are no longer in circulation. He has a Twitter account where he posts old pictures of himself and writes "a lot of" as "ALOTA"—all caps. I am conditioned to find arrested development in men endearing, misappropriate *yearning* as the reason.

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When I got with the bartender of my ex's favorite bar, I saw he too *yearned* for a past self, his hollow frame still warm from when fortified. He was too comfortable having sex in front of his dog. I am still uncomfortable with *parts*. He told me I reminded him of his father, which I couldn't help but take as validation.

A close friend of mine said she could tell since the day she met me I wasn't cis. It felt good because I didn't have to solicit the assumption. I want to believe a name is a name only in name. I dread icebreaker pronoun-sharing for this reason—please, don't make me say it. Please, let me wrap these words up in tulle, blurry but not altogether hidden. Let me traverse the line between grin and grimace, showing a sliver of teeth to warn, "Will bite if prompted." I'm *yearning* too, for a feral mold. Look at my canines and tell me you understand.

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A New Life

Art by Lari Johnson



Avocado Sunset

Art by Loraine Scalamoni



Parker

Poetry by Paris Backston

I don't believe in sunsets.
I want peaches to always rise ripened.
I want the mountain ridge to kneel and
glue itself to your toes.
It's in the way you blink,
slow, sultry,
half-lidded hellos,
an aurora of swaying lashes.
I left my left ventricle
somewhere in the Nepalese mountains,
pumping out paradise onto snowy white caps,
beating down ridged peaks in perilous pursuit of you.
Whisper at my fizzing feelings
and I will drink you in
coca cola sweet—
You are epiphanies found in tender moments,
and my caged heart is rattling.
Won't you reach right through, ghost
fingers, and latch onto mine?



These Husks

Poetry by Saifey Maynor

His eyes are the same color as mine, and his lips are always curled up in a smile.
I passed him by driving through the rez the other day. I turned around and gave him a ride.
Took him as far as the arroyo. *I can go no further*, he said. Then: *It's dangerous to be kind to folks on the roadside. I might be a friend of your family, but the two of us are strangers.*

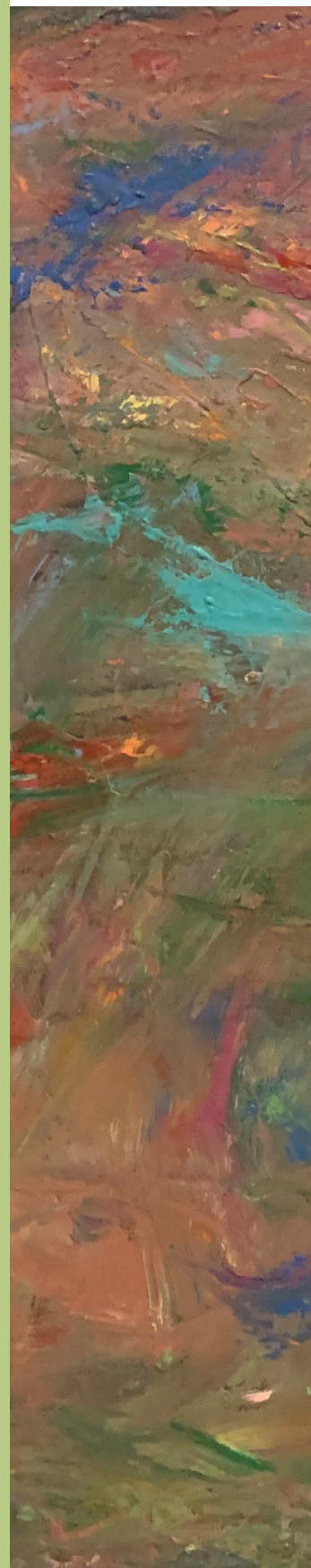
So I left him there, in a soybean field, on the county line. His scarred hands are clean for someone who works with dirt, eyes and hair and nails one long vein of earth, and his lips are always curled into a smile that lights up his farmer's tan, as dark as mine once was. He never talks about it, but

his relatives would hold him over their tub, and scrub and scrub him down, just like mine did. Jesus bleached his skin just like a girl to match the bright skull-splitting halo no man should bear alone. But his folks must've been as blind as Lady Justice was, because

no home is a home without dark corners to rest your eyes in, and in hell, I hear that it's high noon all the time.

He blends in with the beanstalks that stand up to his waist as he waves bye-bye to Pappy's pickup truck and me. His hands are clean, his skin is brown, and his lips are always curled up into a smile. Not like mine, no.

Not like mine.



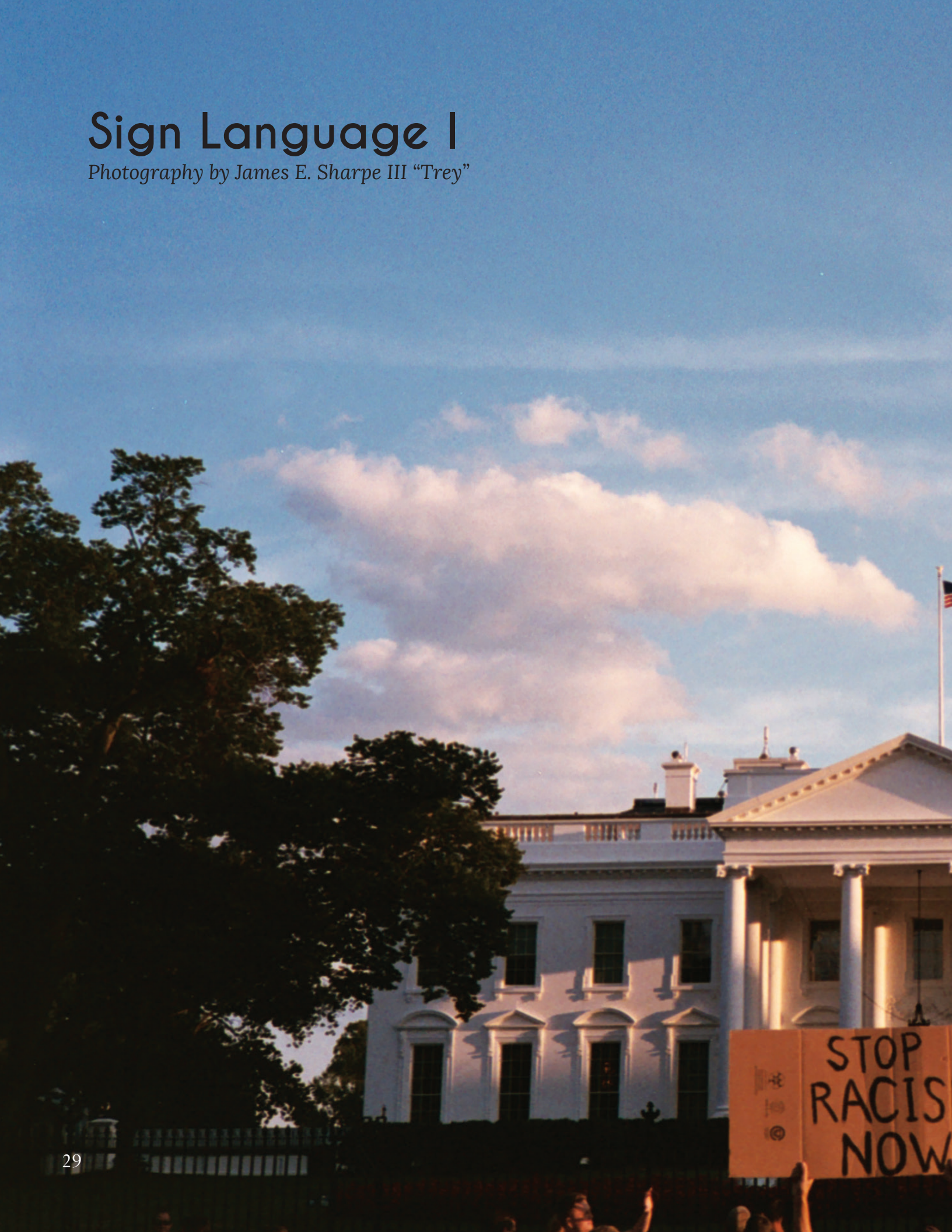


A Gift from the Past

Art By Lari Johnson

Sign Language I

Photography by James E. Sharpe III "Trey"





Miss Sarajevo

Poetry by Gianna Spitaliere

Velvet drapes
hide ashen crumbling walls.
Rows of folding chairs
line the fragmented remains
of a basement where
natural light cannot reach.
35,000 buildings destroyed.
A hand-painted sign reads:
“1993 Miss Sarajevo Beauty Contest.”

Layers of makeup
smear over
scars and burns and bruises.
Red silk dresses
cannot cover violated bodies.
Feet barely squeeze
into dress-up heels,
wobbling to walk.

The ground shakes
beneath their feet.
329 shell impacts per day.
Flashes of crimson lights
shine in from above.
5,434 civilians killed.
13,952 killed in total.

Here she comes.
Heads turn around.
Inela Nogić,
surreal in her crown.
A plastic smile,
temporarily stamped on her face.

Yellow flowers limp in her arms—
the first gilded color of hope
this world has seen in months.
Where did they come from?

Bastard sons and daughters
cheer for their mothers.
521 children killed.
They don't know why.

Behind the winner,
contestants bear a banner,
stretched amongst them all,
that reads:
“Don't Let Them Kill Us.”







Leap of Faith

Photography by Ian Hill



Contributors

Joshua Aelick writes from Raleigh, North Carolina, where he is currently a student at North Carolina State University studying Creative Writing and German. He is also the Social Media Manager of the NCSU English Club as well as a member of the literary team for Windhover Literary and Arts Magazine.

Paris Backston is a Recreation and Tourism major and a Creative Writing minor from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She's originally from California, but she traded western beaches for eastern beaches. She loves food, traveling, and meeting new people.

Liza Bencheikh is a twenty-one year old university student in Rochester, New York currently studying French and Economics. Her passion for the literary arts started in early childhood, and by age seventeen, she finished her first book manuscript. Liza has hopes of becoming a novelist.

Joe Bowling is a comedian and writer from Los Angeles, California. He likes going outside. You should go outside more.

Emmi Conner is a senior at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, studying creative writing and history. She writes fiction and research-based nonfiction. Conner is from a small town called Harris, North Carolina and now lives in Wilmington. Her work has been featured in Adelaide Literary Magazine.

Zoë Däe is still an emerging writer, so she only has a couple of publications. Her work has appeared in Sixfold and The Peel Literature and Arts Review. Däe lives in the mountains of North Carolina with her wife and attends Appalachian State University.

Ian Hill is an adventure athlete who found a camera. Professionally, he's co-founder of a MedTech startup and a Mechanical Engineering Ph.D. student at Duke, but whenever the opportunity presents itself, he's climbing, mountain biking, snowboarding, or just somewhere in the middle-of-nowhere shooting photos and videos.

Lari Johnson is a Studio Art major and Psychology minor from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She is from Smithfield, North Carolina and has lived there her whole life. Lari's passions include painting, taking photos, and traveling.

Rilee Knott is a University of North Carolina Wilmington senior double majoring in Digital Art and Studio Art. She says the only thing her works tend to have in common is the color pink, and you won't catch her making anything without it. Rilee says, "I have no idea what I'll do when I graduate, because I want to do everything!"

Saifey Maynor is a Film and Creative Writing student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. His most recent film, *Starring In A Student Production of Goethe's Faust*, premiered at the Other Cinema film festival in their December cycle.

Abigail Miles is a Creative Writing student at Appalachian State University. She aspires to make the world a little more interesting and bizarre through her stories and to share with readers the dreams that both haunt and inspire her. She has been previously published in *Bending Genres Journal*.

Jules Miller is a junior majoring in Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. When he's not busy birdwatching, he's writing stories about monsters and nonfiction essays about the weirdness of our world. He understands the

power of humor in serious writing and strives to find a balance between the two.

Camryn Myers is an unpublished poet from North Carolina where she attends East Carolina University. She is an English and English Education major and plans to minor in Creative Writing.

Loraine Scalamoni grew up in a New Jersey suburb close to New York City, and started traveling into Manhattan at the age of seventeen. She attended the Art Students League which was the first time she drew from a model. She then studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology, later working there as a fashion illustrator. While freelancing, she taught at two New York City institutions: the Fashion Institute of Technology and Parson's School of Design. Loraine began her Fine Art studies again at the University of North Carolina Wilmington to finalize her degree.

Evan Seay is a senior in the Honors College at the University of North Carolina Wilmington pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing with a Publishing Certificate. His work has been featured in several publications online and in print. The rare moments he's not at work, he spends his time outdoors hiking, camping, and listening to the world.

Julian Seddon is a thirty-one-year-old U.S. Marine veteran from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He served in Afghanistan with 1st Battalion 6th Marines and 2nd AAV's. He is currently living in Wilmington, North Carolina with his emotional support dog, Chumley. He is currently enrolled in the University of North Carolina Wilmington studying for his BFA in the Creative Writing program.

James Sharpe is a North Carolina native approaching his junior year at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Every now and then, he takes photos. His photographs were all shot on 35mm film to capture just a few of the things he has seen since moving to Wilmington and the new experiences and places that followed.

Rachel Stempel is a queer poet and MFA candidate at Adelphi University. She was a finalist in the 2020 New Delta Review Chapbook Contest and her work has appeared/is forthcoming in New Delta Review, The Nasiona, Kissing Dynamite, SPORAZINE, and elsewhere. She currently LARPs as a Long Island townie.

Gianna Spitaliere is a synesthetic writer receiving her Creative Writing BFA at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and her Publishing Certificate. She participated in an internship that published an Icelandic travel guide. After graduation, she plans to continue writing and hopes to get a job in the publishing field.

ATLANTIS

a creative magazine

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We are looking for all types of art, photography, prose, and poetry with a unique perspective. We want our readers to experience your mood and talent through your own brush, pen, and/or camera. Show us your most creative, innovative, and personal take on the expansive world around us.

To submit to *Atlantis*, you must currently be an undergraduate or graduate student at any public or private university or community college in North Carolina. Contributors may submit up to ten pieces of art, photography, nonfiction, fiction, or poetry. Please follow the guidelines carefully. They can be found on our website at atlantismagazine.org/submit.

Editorial Policy

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