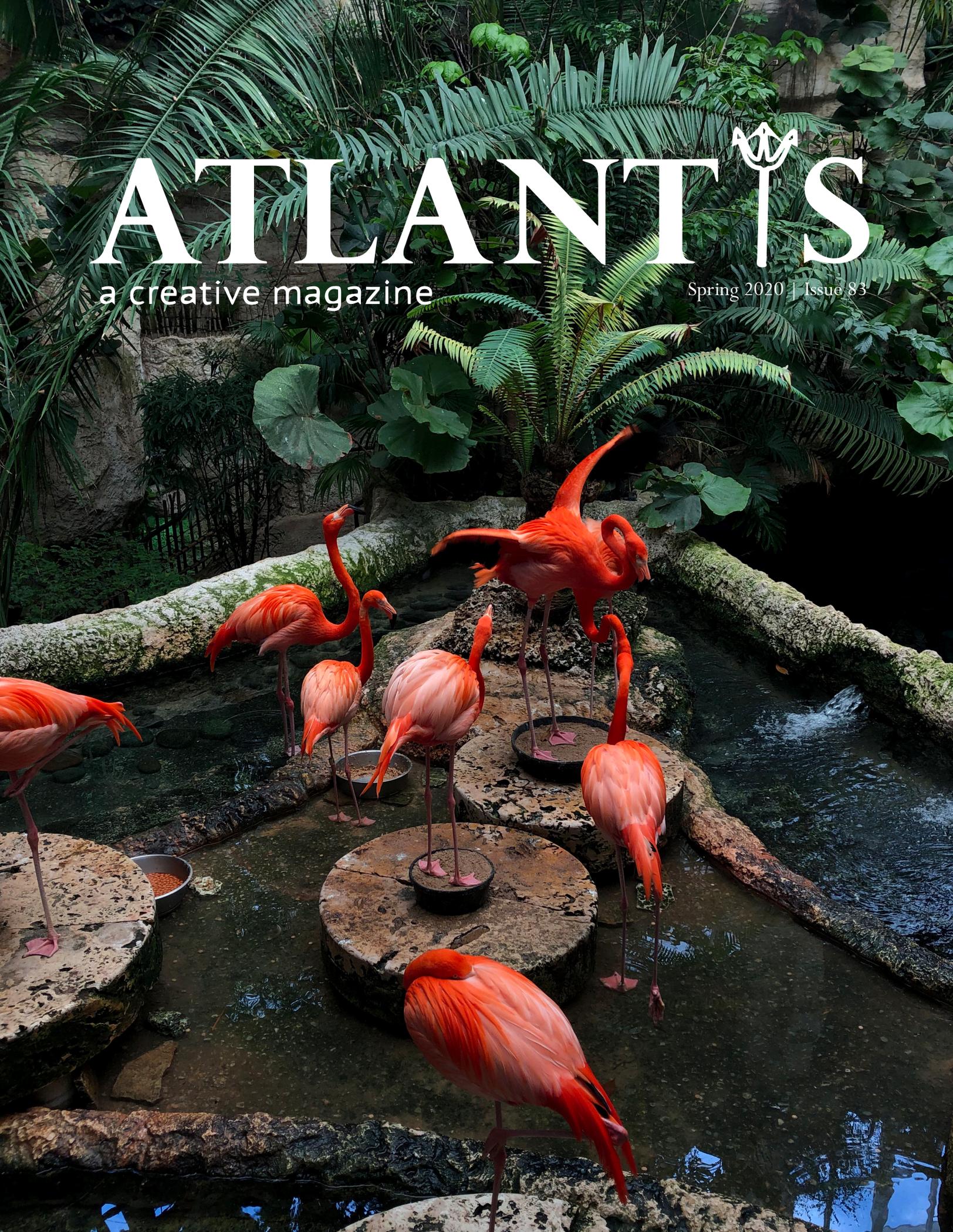


ATLANTIS



a creative magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Thank you for reading our eighty-third issue of *Atlantis: A Creative Magazine*. We on staff couldn't have asked for a better, more thoughtful and more passionate community to be a part of, and as the new Editor-in-Chief, I couldn't have asked to oversee the production of a more rewarding issue. The talent and passion of every member of our artistic community continues to astound and energize me, and I hope that the pieces you find in this issue's pages do the same to you.

It's no fun living at what feels like the end of the world. But it's during challenging times like these that we get to see the resilience of our communities, our species, and ourselves on display. The act of getting up, coming together, and going on—even when our lives today are so uncertain, so different from how they were just a few weeks ago—is the greatest of all our qualities as human beings. No matter what comes to us next, we will continue to survive, to create, and most importantly, to heal. On behalf of the *Atlantis* staff, I applaud all of our faculty for continuing to guide us through this, our fellow students who have proven that they can adapt to any situation and continue unperturbed, and especially our healthcare providers and other essential workers in our various communities, who are fighting to make sure our lives can maintain some sense of normalcy in these troubling times.

Atlantis is a magazine that opens itself to students across the entire state of North Carolina. It's only now, that we are all so divided, that I have come to truly appreciate the power in that—that we are, in some small way, a representation of our state's artistic community: all of our values, our visions, and our voices. Now, more than ever, it's important for us to remember that despite how far apart we are, we are still connected. We are still human. We are still here.

Everyone's "here" is different. For Wyatt Leong, "here" is the struggles of preparing the perfect dinner. For Jenna Johnson, "here" is the day's many intimacies. For Shannon Dowling, "here" is hiding in plain sight. And for us at *Atlantis*, "here" is all of you, who make this magazine possible. I hope you'll be here with us.

Stay strong. Stay safe. Stay here.

Sincerely,
Vasilios Moschouris

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Contents

Photography

- 03 **Kissing Shoreline**
Catherine Strickland
- 07 **Ant Hill**
Conner Lester
- 11 **Fieldgrass**
Conner Lester
- 16 **Swimming in Circles**
Weston Hersey
- 17 **Ocean Sky**
Anna Layton Freuler
- 21 **In Bloom**
Danny Alexander
- 26 **Magic and Happiness**
Weston Hersey
- 29 **Through the Desert on a Van with a Name**
Ian Hill
- 31 **In Plain Sight**
Shannon Dowling

Fiction

- 10 **In the Wings**
Jessica Malakian
- 17 **Honey**
Saifey Maynor
- 33 **The Vale**
Emma Sidoli

Poetry

- 05 **chokecherries**
Meredith Kucik
- 07 **Affidavit**
Donny Donadio
- 15 **Clockwork**
Jenna Johnson
- 28 **Sunday Dinner**
Julia Watson
- 32 **Nackfirgenia**
Lily Crowder

Nonfiction

- 13 **Saving the Rare Disorder Kid**
Hannah Botkin
- 23 **How to Prepare the Best Chinese Moon Festival Dinner**
Wyatt Leong

Art

- 06 **Goldfish**
Madison Desmone
- 09 **Woman No. 2**
Alaina Bubeck
- 27 **Breaker**
Madison Desmone

Cover

Standing Tall
Shannon Dowling

Kissing Shoreline

Photography by Catherine Strickland



chokecherries

Poetry by Meredith Kucik

tonight, i chop vegetables on the edge of the bathtub
and lukewarm water pools at my shins, dammed
by a drain clogged with onion skins leftover from every time
i've wept in the shower before.

come october, the root of a mimosa tree had begun to
worm through a rift in my floorboards. who am i to play
divine mother and condemn it for how it grows?
prune back not a thing! pay it forward! i fed it spoonfuls
of rubies and smashed peas instead.

two swigs of bone broth from a mangled tin and a split
lip for breakfast. i saw myself, for months, consecrating
each day in precisely the same way: i got dressed
in the dark, left my shoes untied and prayed for skinned
knees, because what is love if not scoured?

and i am not the type to go to bed with unwashed feet
or cottonmouth. asbestos milled into my molars, hence
the sharp tongue and bloodied breath; yes, i still grind
my teeth at night. we were such a likely abstraction.

there's no taking it back now. seldom is there ever time
to make my bed in the morning anyway. i'm afraid
these seasick sheets bleached by midnight nectarines
won't suffice as our pièce de résistance. yet,
it's worth noting how even the waterlogged eyes
of fish seem sober if you look close enough.



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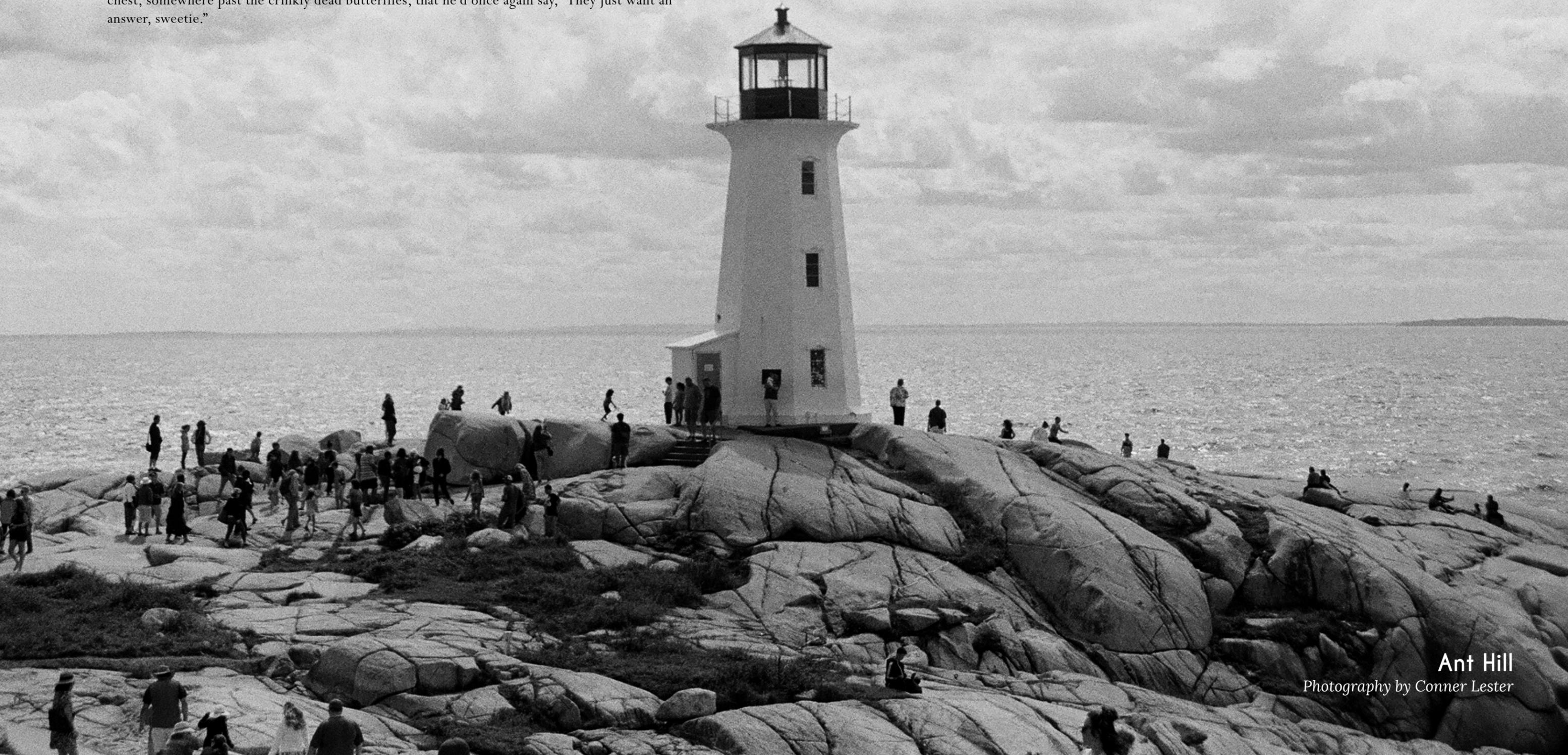
"Goldfish"

Madison Desmone

Affidavit

Poetry by Donny Donadio

In those frigid December days, the little girl lived with her grandparents, hiding from the snowflakes, kept cloistered from her parents, this time in the black Mercedes as Nana and Grandad picked her up from school, balancing a *Frozen* lunchbox on her knobbed knees, trying to muster the courage to ask Grandad, a lawyer, what would happen to her, but knowing in her chest, somewhere past the crinkly dead butterflies, that he'd once again say, "They just want an answer, sweetie."



Ant Hill

Photography by Conner Lester



In the Wings

Fiction by Jessica Malakian

I prep my pointe shoes and look out into the depths of the vast stage and find that I am alone with myself. The stage which has supported the bodies of thousands of dancers, all performing to appease a hungry audience, I now imagine my body absorbing with a series of grande jetes and pirouettes. I realize that the second I walk out in my burgundy shaded tutu, thousands of watchful eyes will all stare. The butterflies flutter in my stomach, aching to break free from the binds of my nerves.

“Attention dancers, the show is about to begin,” a rumbling voice proclaims from the loudspeaker.

I stand and do a last-minute check-in with myself. Hair gelled down? Check. Pointe shoe ribbon tucked in? Check. Internally doubting myself? Double-check.

The rush of adrenaline and anticipation I feel right before a show makes the art of ballet worth it. To go through the hours of rehearsals and to receive the countless corrections and body critiques made dancing up on the big stage everything.

The curtain projects itself upwards, giving me the final warning.

I take a deep breath and descend out onto the stage, immediately feeling the scrutiny and judgment of all the eyes. I move my arms like a swan, feeling the air lift my fingers above my head. I feel my hair slice through the air as I do my grande jetes, feeling like a bird with the power to glide across the open space. I relish at the moment as all of the silent eyes stare back at me, silently judging my body and movements.

It’s electric. But as a bird must come down from a descent, I cave into mine. I leap out of my final combination and my legs give out in a devastating collapse. I land on my ankle and topple down onto the stage floor.

The audience and my teachers let out a horrific cry.

I lie there, looking at the stark white, grim lights blazing in front of me, too weak and broken to stand and make my final bow.

Fieldgrass

Photography by Conner Lester



Saving the Rare Disorder Kid

Nonfiction by Hannah Botkin

Nickole Brown wrote a poem about a kid goat, and it goes like this:

*Reader, I want you tired, every joint
in your body stiff and worn.*

*I want you to finally strip off
your filthy clothes. Then, I want you jolted*

*from sleep by a cry that in your dreams
sounds like an infant wailing*

and, now awake,

sounds just the damn same.

e-o-sin-o-FILL-ik uh-sof-uh-JIE-tis. Eosinophilic esophagitis. A long, complicated-looking name for a rare autoimmune disorder that means it's going to be a while before doctors figure out what's wrong with you. Imagine yourself sitting down to a plate of your favorite food. The tempting aroma swirling in your nose, your taste buds dancing with excitement. You raise your fork, but someone snatches the plate before you can feel the warm sensation in your stomach, leaving a cold, sickly smelling bottle of elemental formula in its place.

At seven years old, I sat at the table staring through that crinkled plastic bottle of powdery liquid until it turned lukewarm, tapping my fingers against the sticky remnants of the Deer Park label I'd torn off of it in defiance. I watched all those missed social gatherings, sleepovers, and school days—all those hospital trips—slosh around the bottle, presenting themselves in gag-inducing clumps of wet, unmixed powder that sometimes slid down my throat.

It's during this time that I started working with animals. Missing school kept me from most kids my age, and frankly, the farm animals were better listeners. I was tired of no one believing in my pain because they couldn't see it. Which is how I found myself working with rescue horses in South Carolina.

*Yes, that's right: now say
His silly goat name—because, yes, every living
Thing deserves a name—and you called him*

*Peanut, a playful way to say
He was a flake of the size he should have been,
So sick he did not jump or play as
he should but leaned his tiny face
exhausted into your leg.*

The owner Katie invited me to the paddock of a sick pony. Grabbing onto the fence, I lowered myself slowly onto the frozen dirt, the little brown pony eyeing me uneasily. Katie sighed; I felt her lean on the fence behind me.

"No one's been able to get anywhere near him since we brought him here."

The pony's velvet ears pricked toward us as she spoke. I watched his sides heave from inside his woolly winter coat, sending puffs like clouds into the bitter air.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"It's his stomach," she said. "He's in a great deal of pain."

It was a feeling I knew all too well. My body struggled to tell the difference between food proteins and pathogens, and one bite of food could force me into fetal position in the restaurant booth. I looked up to see those velvet ears still

pricked in our direction, his ebony eyes growing softer as they locked with mine. As time passed, he came a little closer, like a little kid rolling floaties up on his arms to test the water, still afraid to jump in. I settled into my patch of dirt, trying to show him that this time no one was going to chase him around the pasture. I was in it for the long haul—I would wait and let him come to me.

Spirals of dust floated from under tiny hooves as they clopped cautiously forward. I sat still for a moment before holding onto the fence and standing slowly. I took a step forward and watch the pony's eyes get wider for a moment, then soften again. He let me in closer, I reached out my hand and felt his woolly coat beneath my fingers.

Now, bend

*To stroke his scrawny
Goat neck. Say, "Good boy, Peanut.
We've got you. Now, now there. Everything's gonna be just fine."
You know it might be*

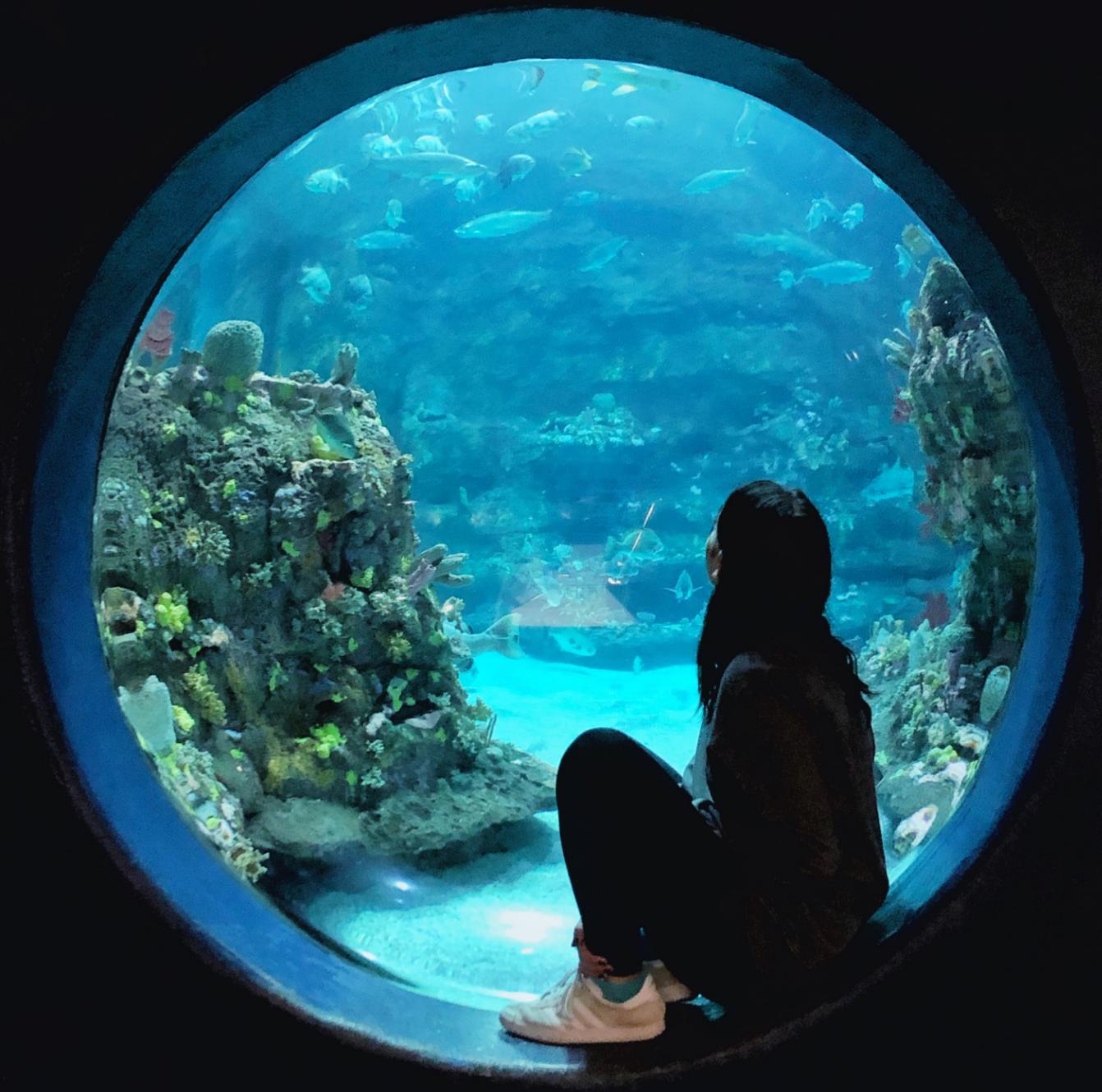
A lie, but no matter.

*This is your job, It's what
You do; it's what needs to be
done.*

Clockwork

Poetry by Jenna Johnson

I know 9 a.m. to be oatmeal and honey and apples down to their cores and cold hands
on coffee mugs and pajamas a glass of water by the sink and jingling car keys
 a green jacket draped across the table as if it's saving a seat
I know 1 p.m. to be leftovers and mountain dew and names dripping away like honey
 staying only as long as the caffeine does I stay only as long
as caffeine does but your name stays with me like the stain on your green jacket
 I know 4 p.m. to be mint tea and a pen recounting names I know and recording
them a name for the green jacket and drops of honey watch the honey slip
through my knuckles I know 7 p.m. to be old-fashioned cheeseburgers and too many
ketchup packets and a green jacket placed on the back of a chair maybe to stay
I know 2 a.m. to be wishing names away like honey wishing caffeine would leave
your body or wishing your green jacket to be as still as the hands on the clock



Swimming in Circles
Photography by Weston Hersey



Honey

Fiction by Saifey Maynor

Nikolai was perfect, and everyone knew it. The other students knew it, the teachers knew it, unlucky out-of-towners who sat still long enough for someone to tell them knew it. The mothers who'd cleared out special pages in their scrapbooks for him and the fathers who carried around pictures of him in their wallet knew it. Most importantly, the Mrs. Scharp, the school orchestra's conductor knew it.

That was why she sat him front-and-center at every recital, a spotlight highlighting his cherubic tangle of curls so the audience knew who to pay attention to. Kids who'd otherwise have no interest in classical music started fighting over tickets once Nikolai made first chair; the principal had given up telling them not to cheer during the more somber pieces so long as they stopped throwing their undergarments onstage.

The rest of the orchestra members were left with an unobstructed view of the dishwater-beige back of the juvenile Paganini's head.

Seth, Nikolai's best friend and second violinist, sat directly behind Nikolai. Right in his shadow. He spent his performances fantasizing about halting his bow mid-note to see if anyone would notice. The only thing keeping him from it was his pet delusion that one of those girls had come to hear him. He couldn't let her down, no matter how stupid, blind, deaf, or whatever she must've been.

After every performance, the two boys drove out to the Huddle House. They ordered twin cups of black

coffee and whatever food was hot, and bitched about the rest of their cabal.

This ritual of theirs was a vestige from the days before the Idaho Philharmonic swallowed Nikolai up. Still, neither of them saw any reason to stop going through the motions. It reminded them that they could still pal around like normal people.

"Claire's timpani was horrible tonight, right?" Nikolai said. The tips of his Botticelli-blond bangs fell into his mug. He flipped the dripping wet hair over his shoulder, disgusted. "She's been such a fuck-up ever since she got moved to the back. Like the audience needs to see every time her mallets slip."

“God, yeah. She should kill herself,” Seth said. He always made sure to sound as caustic as Nikolai to keep his only friend from losing interest in him. The words tasted like bile in his mouth, so he took a sip of his coffee to chase them out. “By the way, dude, you were way off tonight. I caught you bowing on the wrong string twice.”

“I do that to make sure you’re paying attention,” Nikolai said, cutting into his slab of bacon with the same precision as his bow.

Seth couldn’t tell if he were joking or not, but he elected to laugh anyway.

“Did Mrs. Scharp give you your recital piece?” he asked.

“I got that Shostakovich. A-fucking-gain.”

“You’re great on that one,” Seth said. “The recruiter will think so, too.”

“That was on my audition tape, though,” Nikolai said.

He rested his face in his hands, looking mortal, for just a moment.

“I have to impress this guy,” he said. “You know how embarrassing it’d be if the-boy-who’s-going-places never left the Panhandle?”

An image of Nikolai as a pudgy accountant with a bald spot in the middle of his thick hair flashed in Seth’s head.

“Dude’s from Julliard,” Seth said. “You aren’t going to impress him, no matter what.”

He laughed to signal that he was joking, but Nikolai didn’t laugh back.

“Anyway,” Seth went on, “she gave me Tzigane.”

Nikolai’s knife hit the ceramic plate.

“You’re shitting me.”

“I wish I was!” Seth hadn’t put any real effort into playing since Nikolai beat him for first chair the third time, and he wasn’t eager to start back. “She said I could manage it, though.”

The billion-kilowatt halo around Nikolai’s face dimmed, but only for a second.

“That’s great, man,” he said, all smiles again. “Glad someone believes in you.”

“I’m going to practice my ass off all week.”

Nikolai pushed his plate away.

“You’d better.”

Seth’s dry run of Tzigane resulted in a snapped A-string. When he took the bridge out to restring it, he noticed a soreness in his right wrist. Any other night, he would have called it quits, citing carpal. Instead, his mental tuners tightened. He held the bow looser and bowed gentler, and by the end of the hour, he sounded quite listenable.

That night, Seth dreamt he serenaded a gorgeous blonde with Nikolai’s solo. It wasn’t Shostakovich’s piece, not the way he played it. The butter-smooth notes his hands called forth belonged to Nikolai only. But if the blonde noticed that he lacked Nikolai’s grace, she didn’t complain.

Seth woke with an erection.

After class the next day, he went to the orchestra room to rehearse. He sawed away on Tzigane with his back to the mirror; he didn’t want anything to shatter the illusion that he was Nikolai for the hour he practiced. Pretension is the most important trait a violinist can have—for everyone else, there was the fiddle.

The human oil painting himself stood outside Seth’s locker when the hour was up.

“You sound amazing, dude,” Nikolai said. He leaned against a poster of himself advertising the upcoming recital plastered on the wall behind him. You could hardly see his violin on the poster through all the hair. “I’m worried.”

Seth laughed off his friend’s praise.

“I’m not a threat now that I can last a song without snapping a string,” Seth said, putting his arm around Nikolai’s shoulder. “The recruiter is coming to hear you.”

“Threat?” Nikolai said. He clapped a hand on Seth’s shoulder. “I’m glad you’re practicing. I’d hate to see you embarrass yourself.”

Seth fell asleep that night with his metronome app open. The blonde—as warm and, well, stimulating as coffee—swung by his bed again. When he woke up, he felt charged up, even if his phone battery was dead.

If he sounded good enough to have Nikolai worried after only two practice sessions, imagine how good he’d sound after the third.

You have to imagine it. Seth never found out.

When he went to get his violin from the locker the night before recital, the locker and his violin had both been both busted in.

Nikolai sat, slumped over, on the floor. The poster of himself hung over his head seemed to glower down in disapproval at his red nose and puffy nose. Even his sobs sounded musical.

Seth’s knuckles clenched.

“What the hell, man?” he said. “You couldn’t stand something good happening to your best friend for once?”

Nikolai had the same look as the time years ago when a pack of ninth graders tried to make him lick his own rosin. Seth remembered that look well. If he hadn’t swooped in at the last minute like Zorro, using his bow as a rapier, the two boys would’ve never been friends in the first place.

“I swear,” Nikolai said, “I’d let you break both my hands right now if it’d help.”

The thought of the orchestra’s own Icarus brought low at long last made Seth feel the same way that his last few dreams had, but he shook his head.

“You can say that,” Seth said, “because you know it won’t.”

He yanked his violin case from the dented locker. The splinters of his violin dropped onto the floor. He picked up the pieces, and left the golden boy in the dark.

The night of the recital, the chair at center-stage stood vacant. Nikolai’s absence went almost unnoticed in the backstage hubbub by everyone but Seth.

He told Ms. Scharp that he backed over his own violin; she had no choice but to believe him. The other second violinists offered to let him use their instruments, but he turned them all down.

“If I didn’t use my own, it’d fuck with my nerves,” Seth said. Waiting that show out in the wings stung less than he thought.

Nikolai showed up just before showtime. Reeds, drumsticks, cases, and instruments thudding to the floor marked his arrival. Harsh, amplified echoes of

whispers soon followed.

His curls were gone.

Seth watched as Nikolai looked over at the chair where he sat. The two met eyes. Both boys opened their mouths to speak, but the ugly slope of Nikolai’s naked head said everything.

The curtain lifted.

For the first time anyone could remember, no one cheered when Nikolai lifted his bow.

In Bloom

Photography by Danny Alexander



How to Prepare the Best Chinese Moon Festival Dinner

Nonfiction by Wyatt Leong

What you need:

(For pickled duck eggs)

- 1 cup of salt
- 1 gallon of water
- 6 duck eggs (the Asian market on Market Street sells them fresh. Nice.)

(For pork spare ribs)

- Soy sauce (measurements will vary)
- Oyster sauce (measurements will vary)
- Sesame oil (measurements will vary)
- Chinese 5-spice powder (measurements will vary)
- 1 half-bulb of fresh garlic
- Chinese brand black bean sauce (or paste, if you're a degenerate.)
- White pepper
- 2 lbs. of St. Louis Style Pork Spare Ribs (they're cut 1 inch thick and you can only get them from the Food Lion on Kerr Avenue and Grand Asia in Charlotte or Raleigh; also, all St. Louis Style Pork Ribs are not created equal, and will not be the cut of pork you're looking for.)

(For "Chinese meatloaf," steamed pork with salted eggs)

- Canned bamboo shoots, or water chestnuts
- The other half bulb of fresh garlic
- 2 lbs. of pork butt from Food Lion or 4 lbs. of pork shoulder from Costco (if you get pork shoulder, jeez. Good luck. Use only 2 lbs. of it and save the rest of it for char siu.)

(For Cantonese style sticky rice)

- 2 cups of Chinese glutinous rice (sticky rice)
- Mushrooms (any kind with larger heads than stems)
- Dried shrimp (Asian markets sell these, but you're using the bag of more than 50 dropped off by Maa Maa because that's free.)
- Chinese-brand bacon (you're glad Auntie Karen actually sugar-cures her own Chinese bacon and occasionally gives it to you when you visit her in Central Jersey.)
- Chinese brand sausage (it's red, dehydrated, and in the refrigerator section at Asia Life Market next to the shitty ones with rice in them.)

Additional materials:

- Steamer barrel (if you have to ask what a steamer

barrel is, well, you're just making it harder on yourself.)

- Gai lan, or "Chinese broccoli." As much as you want.
- As much jasmine rice as you can stomach (and don't settle for anything less.)
- Human tears (preferably your own)
- Human blood (probably your own)
- God-tier patience

What you do:

Part One: Pickled Duck Eggs

1. 6 duck eggs go into a jar. Very carefully! So as not to break them open.
2. Boil 1 gallon of water, or something.
3. Add 1 cup of salt.
4. Stir together to make the world's simplest brine.
5. Chill in the fridge for a few hours until it's cold.
6. It's still warm, but not hot enough to cook the eggs, so add it to the jar.
7. Duck eggs float.
8. Add more water. Seal the container carefully so the duck eggs are fully submerged.
9. They're still floating. Half of one sticks out at the surface, cresting it like a submarine. Whatever.
10. Let sit in a cool, dry place. It will be ready in 31 days. If you're smart, you'll time this perfectly, so it lines up perfectly with the Moon Festival. But you're not, so it'll actually be a week late. *That's fine, I guess.*
11. Warn your roommates that if they fuck with your pickled duck eggs at any time, you will gut them alive using the meat cleaver, with which you plan to grind pork next month, and take the membranes of their livers as a surrogate for the duck egg yolks.
12. Invite your friends over for dinner 2 weeks in advance. When they all decline, plan to feed your stoner roommates instead. They're easy to impress and they give you free stuff.

Part Two: Pork Spareribs Marinade

1. It's time. Wash your hands. Cut the riblets (not the bones, you idiot) evenly and consistently.
2. Marinate with soy sauce, oyster sauce, minced

garlic, ginger if you want a splash of Shaoxing cooking wine if you don't, a teaspoon of sesame oil, and a few angry spoonfuls of black bean sauce.

3. Your roommate, passing through, might ask why you're doing so much of this. You say, firstly, "Because the Moon Festival is important! And I missed it! I can't just let that go!" Then you think, it's also because it clears your head, and you're worried about what's next for you and your girlfriend.
4. Stir the concoction together in a mixing bowl with your hands. Yes, your *hands*. Do it right. You can wash your sticky *manos* later.
5. Remember when Dave at your last job explained to you how to mince stuff with his knife, and you were completely dumbfounded? Well, it's finally time to actually try it out—hopefully without cutting yourself. Just put 2 fingers on the flat of the blade and rock it back and forth with your other 2 fingers on the bottom of the handle. The knife runs through the cloves of garlic like a shredder.
6. Dave also said you shouldn't really use this method in general. Dave can get fucked.
7. Let sit for anywhere between 2-8 hours, but not less than 1, and not more than 9.

Part Three: Steamed Gai Lan

1. How do we do Chinese broccoli, again? Should be easy, right? You just throw the greens in the steamer barrel and cover it for 7 minutes. Hold up—let's ask Dad. He's at work, but he usually picks up if he's not busy and you don't waste his time.
2. "How the fuck do you not know how to steam Chinese broccoli?" he says, and drops the call.
3. Never mind.
4. Cut the gai lan. If you split it down the middle on the broccoli part (not the leaves) it will cook faster and consistently. If you do it while holding them by the greens, you'll drive the knife into your finger and bleed for 10 minutes out of a narrow but half-bone-deep slit, wondering how you came to be such a good cook and yet make beginner mistakes like that to save time. Especially after honing the butcher knife to razor-sharp. Next time, use the damn cutting board.

Part Four: Sticky Rice

1. The day before dinner time, wash 2 cups of sticky rice. If you don't, you eat dirt and you should always imagine your rice as tasting like dirt, you mouthbreather.

2. Don't cut corners; soak it overnight, and when it's time, steam it—don't cook it in a rice cooker, and *definitely* don't cook it in the pressure cooker.

Part Five: Chinese Meatloaf

It's been a month, the pickled duck eggs are done, and now you need to get started on the Chinese meatloaf:

1. You kept that meat cleaver for a reason; otherwise, you'd be using a chef's knife and a hammer.
2. Lay flat the 2 lbs. of pork onto the heaviest cutting board you've got, and don't miss.
3. Honestly, you'll know when you're done. But you might wake up the whole building in the process.
4. Combine your nearly-ground pork in a mixing bowl with a lot of salt, a lot of white pepper (which you've suddenly realized is actually wasabi powder and have you really been using wasabi powder thinking it was white pepper this whole time?). Actually, forgo the white pepper; add 5-spice, a splash of soy, Shaoxing, and sesame oil. Yes, use your hands again. Quarter water chestnuts and add them in until they appear to give it texture. Add green onions if you're feeling a little less braindead. Portion the pork into 2 shallow bowls. You want to trap the steam and juices in them.
5. Let the pork sit for a while. How long? *A while*. Don't forget to keep everything out of reach of Hudson, your roommate's golden retriever (but he forgot to mention he was mixed with a great Pyrenees, making him the biggest fucking golden retriever you've ever seen).
6. Just before steaming, decide that your girl friend's kind of been really unfair to you and you want to talk to her about it. If it doesn't go well, you come to the realization that you're going to have to break up with her. You'll text her later. Cook now.
7. Also, separate the whites from the yolks. Discard the whites. Feed them to Hudson. Burn them. It doesn't matter. Just do not consume them in any way, because they're extremely salty from the pickling process.
8. The duck egg yolks have a strange filmy membrane developed around them; they're firm and keep their shape, almost like they've been soft boiled. Assume it's a result of the pickling process.
9. Depress 3 holes in each shallow bowl of pork, creating molds for your yolks. Now you can steam the plates for twelve to fifteen minutes each. Steam the Chinese broccoli in the same steamer barrel, but not at the same time as the pork.

10. When the meat turns grayish brown all throughout, and the yolks appear lighter and hard-boiled, you're done.

Part Six: Cantonese-Style Sticky Rice

While you're steaming food, you might as well get to the sticky rice dish. Once you've steamed the sticky rice for about 10 minutes, let it cool off to the side as you prep the other ingredients.

1. Chop up the Chinese bacon and Chinese sage as thinly as you can; they're going to be tiny, and they're going to be rendered down for their grease.
2. Hydrate some of the dried shrimp—say, a handful?—and add that to the mixture.
3. Clean and chop up some green onions and mushrooms. Dice the mushrooms finely.
4. Receive a text from your now ex-girlfriend. She beat you to it.
5. This is where the tears come in. You don't really need to add them to the food. Tears are ultimately just watery mucus with an equal salt-to-fluid ratio as in your eyes, so they're not too viscous to expunge down pipes when you wash your face after spending about 10 minutes curled into a ball in your bathroom.
6. On medium-high heat, stir fry in a wok in this order: Chinese bacon and sausage, mushrooms, green onions, shrimp, rice, five spice/soy/oyster sesame oil/Shaoxing. Go easy on the extra sauces; the bacon, mushroom, and sausage grease are providing a lot of salt content and flavor a ready, and the rest is just a bit of extra seasoning. The ironclad Leong law of fried rice applies: if your rice turns brown from the sauce, we're not going to judge, but it means you did something wrong.

Part Seven: Finish the pork spareribs

1. Lay the pork spareribs in one layer in a shallow bowl or just a plate. You'll be steaming them, too. If you need to steam two batches, do it; do not pile or stack them in the steamer. No further preparation is really needed. Encircle the plate with a drizzle of the black bean sauce and steam at a deadly boil for somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes.
2. Serve over white rice.

Part Eight: Dinner is Served!

1. Advise your round-eyed roommates and their friends that the pork spareribs are very saucy and go best with rice; the Chinese meatloaf is also very heavy and should definitely be with the white rice. The sticky rice is a little superfluous, but if steamed pork and pickled duck egg yolks doesn't sound like an appealing combination, they're free to have some.
2. Stay around long enough to soak up the lightly toasted compliments from your friends before returning to your room to finish your food and think of something else that will distract you. At least you still have to wash the dishes before the night's over.



Breaker

Art by Madison Desmone



Sunday Dinner

Poetry by Julia Watson

I watch Annie cradle
the dry kibble in her black mouth

like a mother bird carries
food to lovingly deliver

into the mouth
of her restless child.

Except Annie is fixed. Never
had offspring or a motherly

itch. Anyhow, she carries
her meal in tongued parachutes

away from the cold linoleum
of the laundry room right next

to the barstool where I eat.
She drops the turkey-and-pumpkin

triangles onto the carpet and chews
them one by one. I always questioned

this behavior, thought it made
more sense for her to airlift

her nutrition to a private space, away
from anyone who could steal

a piece like pocket change.
But no, she wants to be

where the action is.
She wants to be the action.

She sits under the faint spiderwebs
in my heels as I eat basil stir fry

or tofu kale-stuffed shells
or whatever meal I am loving

myself with. She eats with me—
a vertical family table.

The metal clink of her name
against mine fills the small space

and I think I could live in this quiet
forever. I lower my hand,

offer a bland bite. Gently,
Annie tongues the piece,

lays it on the ground.
I catch her eye before one

bite. The milky black marble
stares like a child waiting

for the end of Blessing. Bless
this food. And the company it brings.

Through the Desert on a Van with a Name

Photography by Ian Hill





Nackfirgenia

Poetry by Lily Crowder

Each day I wake and I pray to the gods of the gods to make us all feel good but the gods of the gods are hard to reach and it costs 87 cents per minute to call them on a broken payphone. I recently emptied my bank account into a bag of frozen chicken nuggets which I left in my car overnight. It was warm for February so I had them for breakfast the following morning. No oven necessary. My first kiss had pigtails and a lust for sour gummy worms and climbing on counters. Sometimes the sun would set just right and the stars were just bright enough at 11:34 p.m. on a school night that it was easy to forget the world is rectangular and the side we sat on was facing a planet called The Ocean. Hey, I finished studying Wordsworth and I think I know everything there is to know about the perfect prose—I'm just trying to figure out why it matters and who cares? Godspeed sweet ducklings crossing the road at 6 a.m. on a work day! We're driving too fast to notice anything but this goddamn traffic. I invented a new word called "nackfirgenia." It means: eat as many plums as you can before you die. Love hard and drink soup from cans. The world revolves around a 4x4 picture frame with whoever you think best suits the square. Waylon Jennings bore me with the intention of raising a tried and true American with no love for country. (But with a relentless love for dirty feet and the joy of a newborn finally latching.) Kiss your Great Aunt Virginia's cheek before you check out of the smelly sanitorium. Humans are 60% water and plums are 87%. We're surviving off the same stuff. Don't forget who you are and what color your umbilical cord was and that you are 27% away from being consumed in a nackfirgenia incident. I exist because I am supposed to! Life is short and trees are dying! Read a book and stop pretending everything is easy.

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In Plain Sight

Photography by Shannon Dowling

The Vale

Fiction by Emma Sidoli

The day Ray Callows died, the fire department let the Vale burn out. They found him face down, his back burned, his hair singed at its dirty-blond tips, and carried his body up the hill where we stood. The ambulance nurse told us he suffocated, went unconscious, and died shortly after. He said it was a better way to go; the flames had no real say in Ray's final moments. The city ruled it a suicide.

Throughout June, Ray and I spent our days in the Vale: a vacant lot in the bottom of a ravine that split the neighborhood in two. Some rich guy had bought the property months before, but lost interest before any semblance of a house was built. Progress had slowed, and weeds had sprouted from the leveled lot and twisted around the abandoned wooden beams. If not for Ray, it might've been fully consumed by August.

Before the end of June, on a particularly suffocating day, Ray Callows stood proudly slouched, wearing black in the face of the summer sun. His straw-colored hair furled under whatever hat he wore that day, and overgrown stubble sat plainly on his face. There was a charm about it all though. He looked put together, like it took a lot of time to look that half-assed.

Ray had to drag me out of my house, insisting today was cooler than most. The air was thick on my skin, and sloshed around in my lungs like soup. The summer heat never seemed to touch him.

Ray was always "fine," if I asked him. So I didn't ask him; I just took my best guess as to what wasn't okay, then shot for that instead.

"How are you feeling since Julia left?" I asked.

People tended to stay in town after graduating, but Julia had never planned to linger past May. Ray knew that but dated her anyway.

"Fine, I think," he said. "She's fucking lucky

she got out of here."

He spoke with an absence of the confidence that once lived on his tongue.

Ray wore a new bruise on his arm. It didn't stand out, not among the cigarette burns and jagged scars that kept it company, but I understood it.

"What set him off this time?" I said.

I worked to keep my voice level.

"Got home late. It doesn't matter," he said. "Barely hurts."

Ray moved and the bruise disappeared in his sleeve.

He never fought back, even though his temper matched his dad's. Maybe that was why it lashed out at everything and everyone else.

"We could go in on an apartment together," I said. "I just gotta get settled at school, pick up a job—"

"Aaron, shut the fuck up for a couple minutes," Ray said.

"Yeah," I said, "sorry."

I never learned to be quiet. Neither did Ray, but it wasn't the same.

At that point, I stood as a bystander to Ray's whirling anger. I think he saw it as manhood: a hurricane of all he deemed unholy that he set in front of himself to spar with.

"What about the future?" I said.

Ray's eyes were hidden in the shadow of his hat, but I felt the weight of them on me.

"What *about* it, Aaron?" he said. "There is no future if there's no present worth giving a shit about. You just want me to use it to forget that I'm crashing right here, right now. It'll all be burned up by the time I get to it anyway."

His voice softened at the end. Ray's ramblings were half-genius, always. The other half was self-martyrdom, or maybe just a child screaming through a man's throat.

Ray left me as his will. That was selfish and fucked, but he left me here without the Vale or a note. All I thought of after was what he would've thought.

I saw tourists get lost and heard Ray mutter "pricks" under his breath. I saw the school building and Ray in there working hard as hell, as a fuck you to his old man. I saw the Vale and his last decree. One last passionate undertaking that finally swallowed him. I saw the gasoline can he used to extinguish June like wasp nests, and I saw the flick of his lighter. I was sure he swore when everything went up; it couldn't have been too pretty or poetic.

I knew that's why it wasn't a suicide, too. Ray wanted to watch the Vale burn, not burn with it. He wanted his fury and fire on display, only to fizzle out. Instead, it consumed him. The fire was another growing pain—a fit.

I called Julia a few days after he died. I told her he burned in the woods. She choked up and said, "oh." Then she hung up. I wasn't worried about her, as I knew she would be okay. I think that was why Ray loved her so much.

I only returned once to the Vale.

The morning after Ray's funeral, I put my suit on again, walked across the neighborhood to the hill, and then down. My clothes collected June's ashes from the ground and tattered them until hiding that trip was no longer viable.

The heat was still suffocating, but I did not attempt to breathe as hard. Now Death knew Ray like I did. I found pride in being his fury's only witness. I couldn't feel like that anymore.

The Vale was not where Ray was buried, but it was where I buried him.

•

Contributors

Danny Alexander is a Sophomore at UNCW. He is from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and majors in Communication Studies. Danny enjoys talking about movies and music and being around his friends. He is currently trying to pick up a bunch of hobbies that he'll drop within a couple months. You can find his other published work in *Second Story Journal*.

Hannah Botkin is a Sophomore majoring in Creative Writing at UNCW. She loves experimenting with creative nonfiction and poetry, and has had her poetry published in the *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*.

Alaina M. Bubeck is currently a Junior at UNCW. Alaina is majoring in Studio Art and minoring in Art History. She has always loved charcoal and is now becoming a fan of oil paint. She is interested in realistic portraits, but also loves to create some abstract pieces. After graduating from UNCW she hopes to get her Master's in Art Education and become a high school Art teacher.

Lily Crowder is a Creative Writing major with a minor in English Literature. She was born in Wilmington but refuses to get a tattoo of a wave on her ankle, or a bumper sticker with the outline of North Carolina on her car. Despite her stature and gender, she is the long-lost member of the Highwaymen. Lily shares a name with a popular flower, though she can't garden to save her life. She began writing while her umbilical cord was still attached and has yet to find anything she loves more.

Madison Desmone is a Studio Art major with a minor in Creative Writing from Emerald Isle, North Carolina. She has always had an interest in art and began drawing at a young age. Her work is inspired by her life and the beach, and her favorite mediums include painting and printmaking.

As a child of China and the American South, **Donny Donadio** read and wrote under bedsheets, in back-

yards, and flying over polar icecaps, enthralled by Tolkien and Asimov. Now an editorial assistant at Lookout Books, Donny will graduate in May 2020 with his BFA in Creative Writing and Certificate in Publishing. A gamer since his PlayStation 2 days, Donny plans to write a future Game of the Year.

Shannon Dowling is a Recreational Therapy major at UNCW who loves photography and practices it in her free time.

Anna Layton Freuler is a photographer and History student at UNCW—and also a small-town kid using her spare time to take pictures.

Weston Hersey is a Freshman at UNCW in the Film Studies program. He is a lover of all things art, and tries to encapsulate the plethora of feelings he has into the things he creates. He hopes he can help you feel something too.

Ian Hill is an adventure athlete who found a camera. Professionally, he's the co-founder of a medtech startup and a Mechanical Engineering PhD 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.

Jenna Johnson is a Freshman at UNCW pursuing a double major in Creative Writing and English with a minor in French, in addition to a certification in publishing. She has been writing poetry for five years and has compiled an eighty-page manuscript of her work. She is also training to become editor-in-chief at *Second Story Journal*. She aspires to become a professor in Creative Writing to encourage others to pursue their passion for writing.

Meredith Kucik is a twenty-year-old writer who hails from Maryland but now lives in Wilmington year-round. She is currently a Junior at UNCW working

towards a BFA in Creative Writing alongside a Certification in Publishing and a minor in English. With a nonfiction concentration, much of her writing is stylistically lyrical and tends to be explorations of the subconscious self, using surrealism to delve deeper into the enigmas of the world around us. Her love for distilled language has encouraged her to experiment with poetry as well. Some of her most cherished pastimes include film, photography, and anything that keeps the sun on her face.

Born and raised in Trenton, New Jersey with his life split in half between the North and the South, **Wyatt Leong** likes to write fiction and nonfiction documenting his experiences in the divide between the North and the South as a Chinese American as he pursues a BFA in Creative Writing at UNCW. He is currently working on a collection of short stories and three novels, and is also a scriptwriter for TealTV's political satire show "With the Facts."

Conner Lester is a Senior at UNCW, completing his bachelor's degree in Physics. After graduation he is heading to Duke University to pursue a PhD in Earth and Ocean Sciences. He is captivated by the laws of nature and the elegant mathematics used to describe them. Outside of the classroom, he occasionally ventures off to remote places to camp, hike, surf and take photos. With his SLR film camera, he aspires to steal subtle moments of the world's natural beauty.

Jessica Malakian is a Junior at UNCW and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a Marketing Strategy focus. She is now a marketing intern with Tek Mountain, where she helps aid in marketing strategy projects. She is also the newly elected VP of Administration for Pi Sigma Epsilon and is a member of the Honors College. Jessica loves to read, spend time with her boyfriend Josh, and

hang out with her family. "In the Wings" is inspired by her time as a ballet dancer in New York City, where she pursued a professional career.

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

Emma Sidoli, is from Asheville, North Carolina, and is a Junior at UNCW majoring in Creative Writing. She's wanted to be a writer since the fourth grade, when she won a contest with a poem about dirt. Her writing has only gotten weirder since then.

Cat Strickland is a poet, artist, creative, and a Sophomore at UNCW studying Creative Writing and Digital Arts. In the midst of taking time away from school in the past three years, she discovered that art and writing poetry is perhaps, the healing itself.

Julia Watson is a native of Atlanta, Georgia and holds a BFA in Creative Writing from Florida State University, where she won the Sassaman Award for Outstanding Creative Writing. Currently, she is pursuing her MFA in poetry at NC State University. She is the Writer Liaison for *Ember: a Journal of Luminous Things*. Her works have been published in (Un)incorporated, The Kudzu Review, Outrageous Fortune, RueScribe, Hysterical Rag, and forthcoming in The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature. When not engaged in literature, she enjoys cooking vegan meals with lots of sriracha. She likes to think of herself as the lovechild of Robert Penn Warren and Stevie Nicks.

stay strong, stay safe



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a creative magazine

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