

ATLANTIS

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Thank you for reading our eighty-sixth volume of *Atlantis: A Creative Magazine*. If I had to choose one word to describe this issue, I think the best would be “transitional.” That word is one I’ve often been using to describe these past few months, as more and more we move out from the shadow of the pandemic, but it holds significance to me beyond even that.

Not only does this issue mark our return to printed copies after a COVID-induced hiatus, it also serves as my last issue as EIC of *Atlantis* magazine, and a capstone for my time as an undergraduate student. Along those lines, something that working at *Atlantis* has shown me, perhaps better than anything else, is the awareness of mine and my peers’ place within the world. The students published within these pages, as well as those working behind the scenes to put them together, represent a sampling of the rising voices and visions of a new artistic generation, and the greatest part of my time at *Atlantis* has been providing these artists with a platform to be heard and to be seen, many of them for the first time. I don’t think it’s a stretch to say that *Atlantis*, and magazines like it, are a proving ground for those that will come to shape our time and our culture to come: our future writers, painters, and photographers, as well as our editors, designers and readers.

So as you move through these pages, whether digitally or physically, please take the time to sit with each of the wonderful pieces of prose, poetry, art, and photography we’ve collected to mark this latest transition. Meet them on their own terms, in their own times. View them not in isolation, not as singular things, but as the first of many steps these young artists will take on the way into their futures.

I am immensely proud of, and thankful for, my staff and all of our incredible contributors for seeing this issue to fruition. Thank you all for your hard work and boundless creativity. I can’t wait to see what comes next.

Sincerely,
Vasilios Moschouris
Editor-in-Chief, *Atlantis* magazine

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red clay

Poetry by Cassandra Sigmon

you throw money at the land and sprout houses and driveways and
fences stitched into the red clay my clay sharp angles don't belong
in nature don't belong anywhere especially not here Twain said the
world doesn't owe you anything and he was right the dirt was here
first you don't get to rip away the life and dig around for favors all
the softness is shrinking because you cover and cover and cover it
up until the mud oozes out of a patchwork shell like the earth needs
armor (it shouldn't) but in the south when you stab the land it bleeds

‡



Feminine Energy

Art by Magdalene Bamber

fragmented—

Poetry by Hannah Carlson

the dog days unfold slowly now:
lost keys become lost trains
of thoughts abandoned
like former lovers,
forgotten conversation
as simple as how are you
becomes a silent chaos
because I don't know
who I am.

I tell you stories
of autumn rain against my windowpane,
echoes of an organ in dusty sanctuaries,
vanilla in the air,
this forgotten promise
around my finger—
once, this was all mine.

my mind is a foreign landscape
looping in true circles of motion,
going nowhere, everywhere, lost,
always returning to the dawn.
you sit beside me and listen.

tell me what went wrong.

a thousand years have bowed
to us, and now
it is my turn to disappear.
I am dwindling, I cling to you.

I have lost so much and I am
tired, fading, fine.
I've fought my way back to you,
but we're still memories apart.

I once wrote haikus,
every detail for you, dear.
(it's all gone now)

the swelling darkness
of memory suffocates.
your hand in mine, I see you
I hold you, tell me—

Remember.

we were born from the dust.
in a breath of air, we all cried,
close as language can come
now that I have lost my words.

faces have lost their meaning,
even my own.
but yours—my tired body knows
every ache of life that brought you to me.
sore joints trace your smile.
tell me my own stories.

you are my star map tonight
as the stained-glass sky unfurls.
tracing my bones like constellations,
you whisper in my ear.

repeat my stories.
I remember you.
this world allows endings,
and we begged for time.

if I had not forgotten myself
we'd never have to say goodbye.





Strength in Motion 2 & 3

Photography by Magdalene Bamber



Collage No. 1

Art by Lari Johnson



Strands of Black Hair

Fiction by Adriana Henrichs

I keep finding black hair in my new dorm room. On the floor, in the closet, under the bed—everywhere. Tangled up in bunches like tumbleweed and in singular strands that worm their way into my clothes.

The hair isn't mine. My hair is a golden blonde, which I have kept in a shoulder-length crop since high school. The black hair I keep finding is longer than mine and straighter than a Mormon missionary's tie. It was probably once pitch black, but the dust from the room has settled on it and turned into the dingy black of a just erased chalkboard.

This hair, which I've found in my sock drawer, in the nightstand, and stuck between the mattress and its' frame, belonged to another girl. One who called this room hers before I did. With the amount of hair I keep finding, I wonder if she has any left.

My sophomore apartment had a problem with black hair too. Out of the six of us in the apartment, there were only two with black hair. And they would let it accumulate on the bathroom floor, on the kitchen counter, and in the sink. There was no denying it was theirs. Even though they tried.

My other roommates and I attempted to convince them to clean up after themselves, but it never worked. And none of us wanted to be the one to clean it up. So, it sat there. For days or weeks before one of my brunette roommates would cave and throw it away. I never caved.

One time the hairball in the bathroom grew so large that a roach got stuck in it and died.

The roach incident was one of the reasons Lauren left the apartment halfway through the school year.

"I can't deal with this bullshit anymore," she said. "The hair is fucking disgusting."

I nodded. It was disgusting. But it wasn't the worst conditions I had lived in, so I let it slide.

At my new apartment, I don't have anyone else who will take care of the hair for me. The hair is only in my room. Making it my problem and mine alone.

Each time I throw away another clump of hair I wonder if this girl even realized how much hair she left behind. All the hair she brushed out had to go somewhere. Hair doesn't simply disappear. I suppose one could argue that the dark blue fabric of the carpet could make it hard to see the hair. But to me, the black hair sticks out.

The first, and so far, only, girl I ever kissed had black hair. Her name was Sammy. She usually kept her hair up in two space buns near the back of her head. The space buns were thick, perfectly round, and large enough that they looked like Mickey Mouse ears permanently attached to the back of her head. Whenever Sammy would turn her head the buns would wobble. But I never saw a hair fall out of place.

In high school choir, I would gaze at her from across the room and wonder what she looked like with her hair down.

I sit at my desk, resting one foot on top of my knee, when I find yet another piece of black hair stuck in one of my socks. I sigh and pluck the hair from the cotton. I place it on the desk to throw away later. I've gotten used to finding this stranger's hair and grown mostly indifferent to it. There's still a small twinge of annoyance with every discovery, but it's amazing how fast you can accept things as just part of your life. Like a shitty job, or being diagnosed with depression, or having to repeatedly throw out a stranger's hair.

Sammy and I were at a party after our senior show choir competition and we were tipsy off of a couple of shots of cupcake flavored vodka. For once, she had her hair down. And I could not look away. She was like the focal point of a Renaissance painting; beautiful, yet effortless. Beauty like that should be regulated to paintings by the masters. Studied and analyzed, but never witnessed in re-

ality. For if you saw that beauty in real life you could never look away without being haunted.

We sat on a bed together. I don't know whose bed it was exactly. Our classmates were out in the hallway. They were running around and being rowdy, as per usual at one of these parties. But me and Sammy were alone in this room and it felt like our own little world.

I don't remember what she was talking about. I was too busy looking at her hair. Her hair was curlier when it was down, and each ringlet caught the light in different ways. Some looked like the deep blue of an ocean after a storm while others reflected a dark purple hue. For a second, I swear I saw a flash of green. The kaleidoscope of colors mesmerized me.

Sammy noticed me looking.

"Do you want to touch it?" she asked.

She scooted closer to me.

My breath hitched.

There was nothing in the world I'd rather be doing.

"Touch my hair I mean," she said. "I just washed it, and it's really soft."

I nodded gently as I put my arm around her. We locked eyes as my fingers got caught in the waves cascading down her back.

As I ran my fingers through her curly hair, I thought to myself how desperately I wanted to kiss her. So, I did. The alcohol took away the natural fear that typically plagued me.

Our bodies crashed together clumsily. An ebb and flow took hold between us. To keep myself from drowning, I focused on her soft lips and her even softer hair that was caught in between my fingers. I pulled her even closer. I drank it all in just in case this was the last time I ever kissed anyone like this.

"You could just vacuum the hair," one of my new roommates said to me a few days after moving in.

I couldn't remember her name. I don't know if she remembers mine either.

"If it's really that bad of a problem you should just take care of it," she said.

"Yeah, I should," I said, knowing that I probably won't.

I could vacuum up the hair. But I keep having the

stubborn thought that I can't possibly find anymore. Each time I find another strand I think that there is not a single trace of that girl left in my room. And then, inevitably, I find more. At this point, I feel like breaking out the vacuum would be admitting defeat.

I saw Sammy the Monday after the party. She stood alone by her locker. The overhead fluorescent lights made her hair lifeless in their buns. I tried to get her attention from across the hallway, but she refused to look my way. Eventually, I got fed up and walked over to her.

"Hey," I said, "do you want to talk about what happened Saturday night?"

"It's whatever," she said, looking at the cinderblock wall behind me, "we were drunk. And I'm not a dyke."

My stomach dropped.

She lingered for a moment, before pushing past me, her shoulder hitting mine before she left. I watched as the tiniest strand of hair fell out of one of her buns as she walked away.

I stood there in the hallway with a sore shoulder and a minor broken heart. Both felt hollow in their own right.

But what did I really know about Sammy besides the fact that she had beautiful black hair?

Sammy ended up going to college on the other side of the country. I wonder if she is happy in California. I wonder if she has a girlfriend now. Or if she still only makes out with other girls when they drunk. I wonder if her hair is still black.

I find another clump of hair. This time tangled up in my comforter.

"Gross," I huff to myself.

I gingerly pick it up and toss it away. When I first found the hair, I would always wash my hands after touching it. It has been days since I even bothered to do that.

The more of her hair I find, the more I start to wonder who this girl was. Did she have a lot of friends? Did she go to parties? Did she make out with other girls? Did she have someone to run their fingers through her hair?

I go to bed and start to dream about this girl I've

never met. In my dream, she looks like Sammy.

I can't breathe.

I wake up with a jolt.

Something is caught in my throat.

I thrash around in my covers and try to make myself cough. My body writhes and screams for air. I wrestle with the covers that feel like a weight against my chest for a few moments before I manage to stick two fingers into my mouth. My fingers grasp onto something small and fine near the back of my tongue and I pull out the culprit: a black hairball.

I cough and cough and cough. My throat stings and my mouth feels raw both inside and out. What a stupid fucking way to die. And if I had died who even would have cared at this point? My new roommates that I barely know? Sammy? Anyone?

Maybe the girl who got this room after me would have cared. Maybe she would have found my hair in

the corners of the room, or under the bed. Maybe she would have picked up my fallen hair in disgust and wondered who had left them there for her to clean up.

"Okay, that is it," I say.

I get up and go to the living room. I open the broom closet and grab the apartment's communal vacuum. It may be three in the goddamn morning, but I don't care. I have to do this right now, or this anger and fear and bitterness will eat me up from the inside.

I turn the vacuum on, and it comes alive in my hands, mechanically growling for something to eat. I meticulously make sure to suck up every abandoned strand of black hair in my room. I get under the bed, the drawers, the bedside table, the back corners of the closet, everywhere. I never want to see a single strand of black hair again. ♯



Feel This

Photography by Sydney Norman

Black and Yellow Bile: Who do You See?

Nonfiction by Sierra Thoemmes

Mom and I came to a standstill. The air around us seemed to tremble under a palpable energy of tension. Neither of us moved—shoulders squared—and our muscles pulled tight.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Nothing,” she said. “Just got out of the shower.”

Mom shrugged, but her gaze flickered to the walls. Perhaps out of habit, she yanked at the right sleeve of her sweatshirt. The fabric draped down until it covered her hand. When she shifted her weight between the balls of her feet, I dug my nails into my palms.

“Right,” I responded. “Sure.”

Mom flinched at my bite. The silence around us seemed to grow tendrils that rooted us to where we stood.

“Let me see your wrists,” I said.

“No.”

“Let me see them,” I demanded.

Mom’s eyes shined with tears. I held my breath and moved forward to assess her damage. She took a subsequent step back.

Up close, I saw how darkened patches of red stained her clothes. Blood seeped from the cuts on her forearm down her fingertips in thick rivulets. I knew without looking that somewhere in the bathroom a pair of razors, scissors, or maybe a kitchen knife remained.

“H-how bad?” I asked.

My voice trembled over the sizeable lump in my throat. I wanted to be strong for the both of us, so my lashes fluttered in a desperate attempt to overcome my panic.

Mom’s façade, though, shattered all at once. Her eyebrows pinched together as she let out a sob. My heart pounded beneath my chest.

“Please,” she begged. “Don’t tell Grandma.”

I’ve always known my mom as someone with many faces. She’s my two parents in one, the band mom, my best friend. She’s the type of woman who drinks wine out of a cup rather than a glass. Mom’s charisma makes her sociable in a way I never could: people can’t help but love her.

Doctors, on the other hand, know her better as manic depressive—the two sides of an emotional spectrum.

“What’s wrong with Mommy?” I’d often ask as a child. “Why is she so upset?”

“You’ll understand when you’re older, sweetheart,” Grandma explained. “You don’t need to worry about it just yet.”

Only, even now, I find her illness hard to characterize. Mom’s mood swings don’t seem to have a reason. They fluctuate the same way the seasons change—merely an ebb and flow of time.

From a historical standpoint, at least, bipolar disorder comes from the Greek word *μανία* meaning madness or frenzy. Socrates and Plato theorized that mania resulted in a divine state of beings. They thought Apollo created these individuals for artistic inspiration.

With that image in mind, I often think back on my mother’s pregnancies. I picture her in bed with one hand placed on the round swell of her stomach. She’d sing to me and scribble her lullabies in a frayed notebook. From her flesh, my body constructed itself into a creative vessel.

I wonder now if Apollo accounted for the excess inspiration and agency that leaked from her soul. Is divine intervention what allowed Mom and me to be who we are?

“I realized my manic impulsivity after my first marriage,” Mom told me. “I was flirting with friends and drinking too much. I spent whole paychecks. Everything was out of balance.”

Equilibrium—the very thing my mother lacked. I cursed the irony of it all: how mental illness is anything *but* stable. My research descended into countless rabbit holes—the contrast of a chemical imbalance to abstract interpretations.

The Hippocrates-Galen Humoral Theory is one I referenced to make sense of my mom’s condition. Hippocrates believed melancholia stemmed from



Playhouses

Art by Shannon Kerrigan

an excess of “black bile,” while mania came from “yellow bile.” The Theory of the Four Humors states that in order for people to be completely healthy, the “humors” have to be in perfect balance.

Logic didn’t yield results for me, however, so omnipotence appeared a better route. I preferred to imagine Mom as someone created for a specific purpose rather than being a victim of chance. At least then her suffering had a purpose.

“My mom is a witch,” I declared in elementary school. “She’s *special*.”

I conjured this beautiful image of her consumed by divinity. The voice of Apollo or some higher, sublime creature would echo in her ears. While mania bubbled in her chest, an intoxicating, golden light shimmered from beneath her skin.

I find now that I like that glamour more, only I wish I could say her disposition is that beautiful, or that I can remember a time she acted as such. The memories I have of my mom’s disorder are filled with black bile, screaming matches, and blood.

Mom carded her fingers through my hair. She grazed my scalp with her fingernails in a gentle display of affection. My cheek molded flush to her lap.

Even as a child, I loved literature. Mom read me to sleep every night. One of my favorite stories included *Jack and the Beanstalk*. I fantasized about what life might look like if I too had a magical bean that righted all of my family’s problems.

But fortuitous fairy tales aren’t very forgiving. They’re anything but kind.

“The biggest struggle,” Mom said, “was when I was put on so many meds. It’s very hard not to feel too down, too up, or nothing. You have no feelings ever—I was just going through the motions.”

Some of the earliest known treatments for bipolar disorder stemmed from religious remedies. People would often go to the temple of Asclepius—the God of medicine and Apollo’s son—to ask for cures to their illnesses.

Mom wasn’t so fortunate. I was three years old—too young to have realized it—when she admitted herself into a mental hospital. Mom didn’t want to

go, but her husband at the time gave her an ultimatum: she either had to receive treatment or get a divorce.

His lack of understanding—and unwillingness to listen—signified a serious problem within the community for women with mental health disorders. Historically, gender biases enforced certain stereotypes for women’s treatment and diagnoses. Women are more likely than men to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression. Care, similarly, focuses on recommending pharmaceuticals rather than finding solutions to personal circumstances.

The Greeks and Romans even made deliberate distinctions between male and female dispositions: they claimed both mental and physical pain in women resulted when the womb bumped into their internal organs. The word hysteria itself comes from the Greek *hysterika* which means uterus.

“All the people who did testing were males,” Mom said. “They didn’t want to get to know you personally.”

Holly Hill, the facility she stayed in for three weeks, wasn’t a place for kids to visit. While Mom mourned being separated from my brother and me, she listened to the constant drone of accusations. Doctors claimed that she “drank too much,” and that “this was just situational—[her] life [would] get better.”

Mom told me like so many women before her, and more to come after, the spoken existence of her illness signified something terrifying. Suddenly, my mother wasn’t the same daughter, the same parent, the same woman she had been before. Now her outbursts would be followed by the question, “have you taken your meds?”

“Everything has to do with your medication and disorder,” she said. “It makes you think as a person that’s who you are. There was no concern or validation for how I felt.”

In the end, a little understanding is all she needed, but neither the Gods nor humanity afforded that to her.

Bipolar disorder doesn’t discriminate. In my bloodline, it runs like a red string, binding sinewy muscle to bone. My great grandmother had it, my uncle has it, my mother, and my older brother. The prophecy is ingrained in our DNA.

I considered we were some form of entertainment

for the Gods. The Fates, with their careful precision, wove this story as destiny—a cruel but true drama for the all-seeing to watch. At each of our births, they tied these small, invisible strings to the wavelength of our souls.

“What do you think of this theory?” I asked Mom.

“We’re like puppets, I guess,” she responded. “It does feel like that sometimes. When you’re not in control of your emotions.”

“But wouldn’t that make you angry?”

“I don’t know,” Mom said. She almost seemed resigned to the thought. “That’s just how it is.”

The truth is, after hours of reading, I don’t know where bipolar disorder comes from, nor why it exists. I’ve grown up twenty years alongside it, and I could spend twenty more and still not have an answer to that question.

What I am sure of, at least, is who I see my mom as. Not a disorder, but exactly that—my mother.

“Please,” she said, “don’t tell Grandma.”

All at once, the snap and pop of anger fizzled out. I dashed toward her. When Mom collapsed into my chest, I wrapped my arms around her shoulders. A wail sounded from the base of my throat that I tried to muffle in the crook of her neck.

“It’s okay,” I cried. “I’m here now.”

I led Mom into her room and sat her down on the edge of her bed. This dynamic of aid reminded me of the times when she’d pour hydrogen peroxide on my skinned knees.

And I felt a bit absurd, given the situation, when I pulled out my *SpongeBob SquarePants* band-aids. But it’s all we had, so we just laughed. I wiped the wet streak of tears off her face. She sniffled as I cradled her arms in my hands.

In the next week or month, her skin would scab and peel over. Life always went on.

“I’m sorry,” we said.

We both were. At least together it was only blood, only words. Nothing would ever change the fact that we were mother and daughter. Not the Gods. Not black and yellow bile. Not her disorder. ♯



Roadtrip

Art by Rilee Knott

Anhedonia

Poetry by Lily Crowder

The absence of goodness is something you can't understand until you do. And most of you won't. And you need to be very grateful for that. The day I held a newborn baby and it didn't spark joy I called the doctor and said I need some tests run! And they said give us seven hundred dollars! And I said fine! And the tests concluded that all things which were good were still good—the sun was still setting in the east and carried with it pieces of long, blue silk—candy stores were still open and you could still buy gummy sharks by the pound and carry them in a plastic baggy to your parents' car and eat them all on the ride home—the presents were still under the tree on Christmas and goldfish were still an easy pet to care for. The doctor explained the issue was, unfortunately, not the world. The world was not ending, nor was it losing its vibrancy as I had assumed and perhaps also hoped.

So, I joined the quest. The quest to regain the days where I would wake up and eat breakfast and walk outside and get the mail and open a letter or a bill and then throw it away or leave it on the counter for someone else to snoop through and take a hot shower and sing a shower-worthy song and wash my hair and my back and dry off and go about my day like it was worth having. They tried the pills—they tried the pills for two years—and in that time I died. I was able to successfully die without ever leaving the comfort of my own earth. When I woke up from what I thought was a two-year state of comatose, I realized a lack of pleasure could never be cured with chemicals, only further silenced. Silencing silence doesn't create peace. It creates really fucking quiet chaos.

I got in my car and I did what all good soul searchers do and I drove until the need to ride straight into a telephone pole dissipated. I drove until the road looked like dirty carpet—I drove through the dark rain—the wet exit ramp was no match for my tires—my tires were as bald as my father was by the time he was thirty-five—my tires were as resilient as my father was at twenty-three—and my car spun like an Olympic ice-skater in a perfect, tiny circle. I used that damned three-point turn that had once fucked me over during my driving test to return my car to its forward position and drive onward.

The street sign warned me I was almost back where I started. The dead possum in the middle of the road with still-breathing eyes told me that the weight of the world is not 145 pounds, which felt uncomfortably specific. The one-tire bike in the neighbors' yard let me know that the person you love is not always the person who loves you. Losing hope, I parked my stupid car in my stupid driveway and broke into my own house with a credit card shimmed in the crack of the front door. The floormat tripped me—shouting about how old folks always die and people actually do put blades in Halloween candy. The dishwasher hummed that the use of a seatbelt will not protect you from the hood of another car just as a raincoat will not protect you from lightning.

There are objective pleasures: eating something sweet, reaching the perfect orgasm, laughing at a good joke. But the good isn't good without the bad, and hiding the bad or disguising it as flawed goodness paves a road to disappointment and confusion. Life is fast. People are strange. Pleasure is temporary. Pain is inevitable. You will make it another day. You always do. ♡

Hard Lessons

Nonfiction by Joe Bradshaw

We had empty bottles in my parent's cold basement. Used up vessels of liquor and wine meant to be recycled, but simply cast away in a dark unfinished cinderblock cave amongst other forgotten memories. When I was too young to be interested in what the bottles were meant to contain, I would take and break as many as I liked. Shoot them, throw them, watch them shatter sending shards soaring. Besides the sour smell of that old alcohol gradually rotting into spoiled vinegar, those bottles were a young boy's dream toy. They had all the shock and awe of an accident or a mistake, all the thrill of destruction, without any of the consequences or cleanup. As you gain years, you begin to appreciate those things that have been made and given form. You realize all the time and suffering it takes for humans to get to a point of creation and shape, and destruction loses its juvenile pleasure. The joy of bottles stayed with me.

Clinking of crystal toasts or the crisp sound of carbonation escaping a freshly opened can- these were the sounds I relate to the end of the day, with rest and escape. When the friction of stress becomes so great that you feel paralyzed, that sharp soothing burn of inherited habitual lubrication is the only medicine I will take. It was approved by those authority figures that gives the naïve comfort and guidance. Drink was my first drug and it was handed to me by a family member.

"Are you supposed to be drinking that?" Dad had been sipping on whiskey that night because he had a rough day. I was swigging down my third beer of the night when he so rudely tried to parent at such a late stage in the evening.

"I'm 21 aren't I?" I replied to my father with contempt. A judge told me to be sober for a year, I knew Dad knew that if I got in trouble again while I was on probation I would most likely be spending the rest of the year in a cell. He didn't know that every day and every night sober in this crushing purgatory was killing me, was ripping precious time and value from my youth and identity. Just because a narc in Boone,

NC wanted to earn a bump in pay for raiding some college kid with a DMT lab and a rather robust psychedelic pharmacy (to their visible dismay, it wasn't the meth lab they had expected to bust). I felt no guilt for supplying my friends and classmates with some of the best trips money could buy.

I was wading in a pool of indecision, trying to keep my head from going under. As a young boy undeveloped, I did not know who I wanted to help in life, or if I even had the ability to help anybody. I just liked getting high and forgetting the crushing weight of growing up, of taking responsibility for the life that was being lived. At this point, I didn't want to live. My first major legal encounter formed a bitter repressiveness in me for the world. I no longer felt the need to belong or the desire; I was ready for my recklessness to kill me in some ill-fated accident. I was passively ready to die. The passivity to this approach of suicide culminated in the abrupt crunch of my Uncle's spine in the passenger seat, the drunken disregard for life and being- that trauma of my own creation- pulled apart my purposefully closed eyes.

"Joseph, if you don't take this shit seriously they're gonna put your ass up. Don't think they won't!" My father groaned. Had he not seen me turned stiff and shaking, barely able to breathe, as that man, in his deathly black robes weighed whether to lock me up? I've been lucky to have two well educated veterinarians as parents. I was lucky to go to college, I was lucky to have the luxury of throwing away three years of time there, lucky to pay a lawyer to keep me out of jail, and extremely lucky to have the privilege of my white skin in a broken imbalanced courtroom. As lucky as I was, I still wanted to die. I still felt alienated by a community that labeled me a criminal, put me in a room once a month with a man with a gun that watched me urinate in a cup, made me feel dangerous and unworthy and other.

I started to think the only way I could keep myself from going to jail was to die first. Both felt inevitable and fast approaching. The unearned privilege

of my race would only go so far. In those months of self-pity, I began to realize the unappreciative and myopic approach I was taking to life. Addiction and drugs were so firmly rooted in my daily routine that the drinking had to increase to balance out my growing conscience. Regardless of how unjust I viewed the drug laws in this country, I still was squandering my second chance, unearned as it was. My culpability in the current circumstances slowly became legible. An immature selfish approach to failure led me down a shattered path that I assumed would only result in my own expiration. My parents saved my ass more than once and I still did not value creation. My mind was so depressively soaked in anxiety, so stymied by fear, that all I could do was move from distraction to distraction, always trying to ignore a cold and ever-present darkness that stayed pulling at my temples.

Bill, my grandfather on my mother's side, slowly died of heart failure in 2018. On the night of March 13, Bill sat strapped with beeping lights and plastic tubes as he struggled to complete his one goal for the day: eat something. My family and I sat outside that room, visiting in shifts, and celebrated Mother's Day. I had bought my mother a card on the way there, a tradition I keep every holiday. Her gift was bought well beforehand though, as I had decided to get it for her a few months prior. I had considerable trouble spending time with my parents while I was on probation. I felt guilty, they felt guilty, and it was uncomfortable for a long time. My mother and I had always enjoyed watching movies and T.V together. Several months before Mother's day that year we bonded over a T.V portrayal of E.M Forester's *Howard's End*. I am a big fan of Forester, so I bought her the book and gave it to her at the hospital that afternoon.

She had always been so proud of me wanting to become an English teacher, so proud of the influence she had on my love for reading. I thought this would be a great gift to let her know I was still that person, still had those dreams. Jill's (Mom) arms rushed around me after I gave her the gift in that cold white hallway,

and she felt a small hope. I don't know for certain that was the emotion she was experiencing, but it was what I felt, next door to the antithesis of any hope for her on that day. Joy and grief were very much intertwined in that moment. Joy and grief made up the essence of that day. The absolute destruction of joy and hope later that night were all great contrasts, emphasizeers of the range of life yet to be experienced.

To cope with the overwhelming sorrow of seeing Bill in that nauseated malnourished state, my uncle William and I visited a local bar around 7 or 8 that night. We went under the guise of watching my favorite basketball player, Lebron James, compete in the first game of the Eastern Conference Finals on television. However, both of our true motivations were tied to medicating away this horrific day. Lebron's team lost that game so the more motivation the better. A very clear irony I've been made aware of with alcohol is no matter how forgetful and amnesiac you may get in the state of drunken revelry, the next day makes all too clear the realities you were attempting to part with.

Willam doesn't remember leaving the bar that night. That could be attributed to the blunt trauma he experienced or the copious amounts of bourbon we downed together; either way he doesn't remember anything beyond the drinking. I remember waking up next to him, seeing and feeling the shards of windshield and shattered empty beer bottles that covered the inside and outside of the crumpled vehicle. Some distant streetlights illuminated dark figures approaching us. I was able to gain my bearings and get to my uncle's telephone-pole-indented side of the car. The flip flops I had been wearing were nowhere to be found. I can still touch and see where the glass carved my feet. My Uncle still has great long incision marks where the orthopedic surgeon installed plates and screws that keep him upright today. We both have different scars from that night. In his bed the next day, all beaten and bruised, he asked me to hug him and told me it wasn't my fault. He was wrong, but, he could not have shown me a more pure love in that moment, so unflinching and constant,

the memory will be forever concrete and sturdy as a statue, memorialized in my mind forever.

This does not seem at first to be an event that could foster growth and maturity. However, as the old AA adage goes, you must first reach your bottom before you can accept the change that is needed. My family helped get me into therapy, drove me to community service and, eventually, work. I was able to climb out of a self-repressive death spiral once I saw my actions truly hurt someone else. I always felt if they were just hurting me there was no problem. Clearly, the cycle inevitably hurts others, even if not physically. We all inhabit mutual space and must work together. Especially in positions of privilege, the squandering of that privilege is harmful to all those that weren't so lucky. I again avoided going to jail, something I

don't think I would have been able to do had I not had my parent's money and white skin. Instead of allowing guilt to envelop my entire existence, I chose to let that awareness drive me to help change the system I feel to be so broken. I have continued to strive to enter the education field professionally, starting my first semester at a new college three long years after I was last in school. The pain of my mistakes is always going to be with me. The love that I received to overcome those mistakes is what motivates me every day. The fun of shattered glass and destruction has passed, the romanticism of violence and self-demolition is faded, and the appreciation for growth and creation has firmly rooted itself. ♡

Floral Pier

Photography by Elizabeth Carroll



Ella

Photography by Lillianne Hogsten

Salvation

Poetry by Maya Osaka

His shirt is made of motor oil
and Salvation

His skin is stitched across
the Crown of His head, a wreath,
the leather of His forefathers

When the sun comes crashing down
He watches

slack-jawed
bleary-eyed

When the Night Cries
He cries with it
a deep, Mournful wail
that thrashes trees, rips rivers
A throbbing, pulsing scream
that bleeds deer dry,
scalds the wings of owls

It shreds the air
from the First Moments of dusk,

constant
endless

until the bloodied fingers of dawn
Crush His throat
Quell His voice

He hangs from her fingers
by a rosary,
His tongue
eaten by the Sparrow



Uncanny Valley

Fiction by Ace Perras

'Please don't be afraid of us,' says the graffiti, painted up in forensic red, like blood spatter, beneath the overpass.

The road is older than you are. Cracked pavement and rainbow rainwater drowning the ants in the pot-holes underneath.

God, you're tired. And in a hurry to get somewhere you've never seen, even if that's nowhere in particular. Even if that's nowhere at all.

You're so tired. It's so cold. And the radiator's broken. 'Doesn't matter,' says the spray paint on the lip of the Harriman dam. And of course it doesn't. You're too tired to feel anything but numb.

And you keep driving. Because it's better than slowing down.

This is how movies start isn't it? But then most movies have a better soundtrack than the static and crackle of between-the-bounds radio, switching between some pop song in bubble-and-squeak English and a Quebecois talk show. The R-133 becomes I-89 and the station wavers. Sinatra now, and something else in French that can only be picked for so many words. The sound cuts out completely by the sign that says 'Whitingham.' You *notice* when you break down at the one that says 'Mountain Mills.'

It's a smallish, squarish settlement full of plain wooden houses with plain stone foundations looking plain choked of color against the orange and yellow-red of the hills, standing out like scales on a dragon's back. *Green mountain state your ass*. The ground is muddy and uneven, gumming up around the neglected railroad tracks, memorializing every footprint ever laid there like the surface of the moon. 'One step for man...' and so you take two, then four, then six and lose track after, out of your car and into the water-logged town where the souls of your shoes soles will not be forgotten.

It never does occur to you that you should not do

this, and - if it did - you might find some reason to do it anyway. Something about them having a gas station, even *Kingsbury* has a gas station.

One of the houses is painted - most of them are not, but this one is - the haphazard job flecked red and peeling like the remnants of a bad sunburn. There's a girl in there, staring at you from one of the upstairs windows with such a concentrated look of scrutiny that you're sure - for just a moment - that one of you *must* be the proverbial ant under the magnifying glass.

You keep walking, dragging your feet behind you and leaving long wet ruts in the sodden earth. Battlefield trenches, building up on the toe of your boot. A woman with her arms full of soggy brown paper dodges raindrops that are not there and runs through one of the doorways, fumbling with her keys. Another says "*Joe?*" and stumbles around her gray, swollen tongue.

Your name is not Joe, but the man in your way says it with such confidence that you believe it. Who's to say it isn't, after all? There's no one who knows you here and it's very easy to get lost inside yourself. About as easy, anyway, as it is to get lost at all.

A man with no eyes says "Joe!" and a teenager with green on his lips cries "Where've you been?" and people are staring and you've drawn a crowd. You should say something and you *want* to say something, but you've never been all that good a talker so you just keep walking and hope that maybe these strangers realise you're strange too.

"I'm looking for the gas station," you mutter.

Someone points their crooked finger like a fisherman's hook, and you turn towards a lot of nothing.

"I don't see it."

"You wouldn't," a woman says, two ropes of braided hair swinging out behind her. "There isn't one."

Before you can ask why it was she pointed then, or if there's anywhere *else* to buy petrol from in this

town, you're startled forward as someone claps you on the back. *Hard*. Really hard. Knock-the-wind-out-of-your-shoulders king of hard.

You try to step back, but the mud's swallowed you up to the ankles and you stumble again. A man with big hands reaches out to steady you and you take a step towards *him*. Forward. And this time you don't fall.

"Joe," he says, "it's good to see you." Except he says 'you' like 'ya' in that very American sort of way.

"That's not my name." And you keep walking. Not because you mind the way of the conversation, but because - when you say this - his friendly smile stretches slightly and something dark and brown like river silt creeps out between his teeth. Between all their teeth. So you keep walking.

There are no cars in Mountain Mills. And no tire tracks. Just footprints. Just mud.

Keep walking. Do not turn around.

The gas station is where the woman said it would not be. When you go inside and ask them, the living dead girl at the counter says they don't *have* any gas. "We never have." She's young, maybe sixteen, with rusty chains on her braces and mud in her hair. Gone blue around the blurry edge. Gone bloated at the face.

"What's it like to drown?" you ask her and the words bubble up around you, floating like ice to the surface of a glass.

"I don't know, I guess," she tells you. "It's a small town."

You leave, and leave a trail of dark water *droplets* on the un-mopped floor.

There is a house in the middle of the road going back. You think you know - like you think you know your name isn't Joe - that it was not there before, but it's an old house and maybe it was. After all, you don't know the town that well. And the foundation looks as old and damp as any of the others and not at all displaced. It *is* in the middle of the road that you walked here on, but-

No, don't question this. Don't question anything.

The mud is up to your knees.

There are shoes already laid out on the porch as you

haul yourself up on it by the rail, the steady layer of muck keeping a stubborn hold on you as is the way of liquids apparently. There are women's shoes in red and children's shoes in pink and blue and rubber rain boots. The surface of the wood is mud-tracked with the soles of phantom feet. You do not ring the bell.

Except that it rings anyway, and a woman comes to the door, wearing a pink bathrobe with curlers in her hair. She looks cross. "About time you got here," she says gruffly. "Well, don't just *stand* there, come in!"

So you do. The house smells like bleach and rain-water and you wonder which it is in the puddles that you're stirring as you walk across the floor. The couch is sopping and the rug is waterlogged and more water pours across the carpet from a sink overflowing with rusty orange water.

"I have to go," you tell the woman, but her arm snakes out and grips yours tight, icy fingers digging into the center of your wrist. Pruney and blue-nailed and *cold*. Cold as anything. And as cold as nothing too.

"No you don't, Joe," she says. "You promised!"

You can't be certain your name is not Joe. You can't be certain this house has not always been here. You can't be certain you have not promised the stranger anything. You can't be certain that you need to breathe in.

When she kisses you, it's like algae, swallowing oil. Slimy and slippery and not quite as easy going down as it *ought* to be. Only now you feel it like a freezer in your ribs. And it's not *enough* to swallow it away.

The water rises and the sun sinks outside the window, illuminating your car - all the cars - in the distance, at the top of the hill, and the pictures of bloated, floating dead men on the wall.

And it feels like drowning.

Drowning feels like the loneliest thing in the world.

And you can't breathe. *You can't breathe in.* ♯

Barnacles

Art by Susan Murphy





Ancient German Pot

Art by Mary Katherine Davis

Cigarettes Aren't All Bad

Nonfiction by Julian Seddon

It smelled like cigarettes and dogs—a distinct smell that I have a love-hate relationship with. Even with the windows open, I felt like I was suffocating. I'd like to think the stifled sensation was caused by the filth emitting from Rohm and Haas chemicals or the other factories that littered my neighborhood in Philadelphia, but it was the Kool menthols. The smokey fumes resonated with an essence of a life filled with food stamps, Salvation Armies, and black mold, that truly encapsulated us, letting us know where we were—home.

Mike and I sat on the flattened out green carpet in his living room watching *The Simpsons* just like we always did at 6:00 p.m., our daily dinner time. That good ol' time when the air changed with a melody of spices, smiles, and the feeling of love. That warm-hearted feeling only existed for me in the same atmosphere as a setting sun slowly dropping behind the skyscrapers in the near distance.

I could hear the slight, familiar purr of an exhaust outside the window. So, we ran outside to help Sis, Mike's aunt. She couldn't be described as nothing less than saintly, with her angelic smile and soft, brown eyes. The dogs busted out from behind a white, storm door blending into a blur of dirt, golden fur, circling the yard like they were spinning endlessly on a roulette table. Howling and barking at the passing cars, the labs and shepherds were running back and forth along the fence that paralleled a busy avenue. She told us to go put the dogs inside and to come back out to help her, but we didn't know why.

Sis was my second mother, and technically Mike's too, since Mike's mom passed away when he was only three. I remember there was something different about Sis that day; she was happy-happy. She opened the trunk of her rusted, paint fader revealing more grocery bags than I have ever seen in my entire life. It felt like we had just won the lottery. Not ever knowing what that truly felt like—this had to be close. We couldn't believe it. Sis nodded her head toward the trunk prompting us to get to work. We hauled that

big pile of yellow plastic bags into the house, treading the brick path endlessly as the wind broke against the bags, fluttering all the way until we laid them down in the kitchen.

By the time we finished Sis had already fired up the stove with a match. She lit cigarette while we unpacked the perpetual pile of yellow. I was done unloading my portion. Mike itemized the goods.

Sis turned to me, standing in the kitchen and said, "There is nothing like the warm feeling of having a full fridge."

And in that moment time stood still, my thoughts were completed, and that feeling washed over me like a fading flame of a cigarette as the white faded into red, orange, black, and then grey. Overwhelmed by this sense of completeness I stood there inhaling a new sense of life, and then breathing out that green grass everyone always talks about.

She turned back to the stove to drop noodles into the boiling pot of water. Mike showed me the green ketchup he's been asking for since he saw the commercial first aired. Even Mike's older brother, Kevin, was wondering what the winning numbers were as he stood shocked in the basement doorway. Perhaps, it was love that encased the room from this strange feeling of *having*.

As the streetlights flickered on and the kitchen brightly luminated the yard. The cigarette smell faded away, the dogs were lying still on the living room, and for one night we were entirely boundless. ♣



peace in the wild

Photography by Brielle Barozzini

Contributors

Joe Bradshaw has been an avid lover of literature his entire life. He is currently a junior at UNC Asheville. He hopes his love for writing will help inspire others in the classroom as a creative writing professor one day.

Hannah Carlson is a literature major at UNC Asheville. She is also studying to become a high school teacher. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys growing plants and listening to music.

Lily Crowder is a creative writing student from the coast of North Carolina. She first began writing when the bones in her fingers hardened and has yet to stop. Crowder writes abstract prose, focusing on the human experience as an irreverent series of inconveniences.

Adriana Henrichs is a student at UNC Wilmington working toward her BFA in creative writing. She has an affinity for fairy tales and the supernatural. When she's not writing, you can find her thinking about the stars.

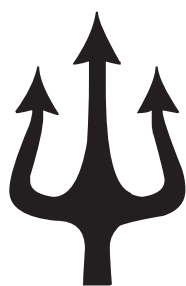
Ace Perras is a junior at UNC Wilmington right now, but she has always been interested in writing. As a kid, she only wanted to draw the pictures in other people's stories, but when she hit middle school, she started to get more and more interested in creating her own. She thinks a lot of that comes from reading things by other people, and maybe from dreams, as cheesy as it sounds to say.

Julian P. Seddon is a 32-year-old U.S. Marine veteran from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He served in Afghanistan with 1st Battalion 6th Marines and 2nd AAV's, in the Southern Helmand Province. He is presently living in Wilmington, North Carolina with his ESA dog, Chumley. He is currently enrolled as a senior at UNC Wilmington studying for his BFA in the creative writing program.

Cassandra Sigmon is a writer from the Piedmont area of North Carolina. She is working on an English degree at UNC Asheville, where she spends her days writing, hiking, and reading used books she picks up at thrift stores. She has a deep love for nature and enjoys running around the woods barefoot.

Sierra Thoemmes is a junior at UNC Wilmington studying creative writing. You can find her other work in the 85th issue of Atlantis for fiction

Maya Osaka is an eighteen year old student at Central Piedmont Community College and an aspiring author. When she's not writing, she greatly enjoys reading, classical ballet, and athletics like swimming and skiing.



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a creative magazine

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