

Spring 2019 | Issue 80

# ATLANTIS

a creative magazine



# Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, Wilmington came together to rebuild. Homes. Businesses. Everything felt touched, violated, by the storm. As the students of UNCW worked to go back to normal, many started to question what that truly looks like in the face of adversity. Our cover for this issue depicts a hopeful new beginning, an ascent toward a bright and creative future—one full of color and life.

Welcome to the eightieth issue of Atlantis. I encourage you to look deeply into the works featured here. Each one illustrates a journey toward a future and toward a sense of self in the aftermath of separation or suffering or loss.

In these pages, you will feel the pain of losing a loved one and the steps it takes to find yourself again afterward. You will feel the course edges of words—like the stones of a wall—as you navigate language as a barrier. You will feel the true sacrifice of serving our country and the loss of self that occurs through trauma. And, as you read, I hope that you find pieces of yourself scattered throughout.

In this issue, our staff has carefully selected pieces that show you the brilliance and strength of the creative community on UNCW's campus and across the state of North Carolina.

Through every page, there is a struggle to find a brighter horizon in spite of suffering. Life is never easy. However, you can find hope and inspiration even in the darkest of times. And the sun will always rise again.

Yours Truly,  
Britton Edwards Allen

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**People Watching**  
Photography by Sara Izzi

# Just Visiting

*Fiction by Catherine Whelan*

You picked at the hem of the itchy skirt hugging your legs.

You hated skirts.

You, a particularly intellectual elementary schooler, prepared a case against the common skirt. But as soon as you began your argument against the demonic device, she used her secret weapon. The decades-old, “He would have wanted you to wear it.”

You knew she was lying, but what defense was there for such an attack? You were outmaneuvered.

You wore the skirt.

Mr. Weaver, the elderly mortician with a nose too curved to be human, approached your mother while wringing his hands.

You didn’t like his hands. They looked too thin and spindly—like needles—yet the skin on them hung like paper curtains.

“The service will begin soon, ma’am,” the old man said. “Would you like me to get the flowers now?”

“Yes, thank you,” your mother replied with a curt nod.

“Certainly,” he said, and disappeared around the corner.

Your mother pulled you along, over the plush carpet, to where your uncle sat clutching an empty paper cup.

“Hey,” he said as he stood from the metal chair. “Glad you guys got here safely.” You got a hug while your mother walked to the edge of the casket.

“What happened to his necklace?” she asked as

she peered into the \$2,000 box.

“I called him Mr. T one time and he refused to wear it again, so we figured that he wouldn’t want to wear it forever,” Uncle Jim replied.

“He looks good,” your mother said, resting a hand on the polished wood. “Looks like he’s just sleeping.”

“Yeah, he does.” Your uncle gave a dry laugh. “I spilled some coffee on him though.” He licked his thumb and dabbed at the stain.

“Good Lord, go get some paper towels,” she said as she stifled a laugh.

“I figured you’d say that,” he relented.

“And be quick about it—the service is going to start soon,” your mother called after him as he left.

“That man is twenty pounds of crazy in a five-pound bag,” your mother muttered.

Mr. Weaver hobbled back into the room, rubbing his leathery hands together. His nose cast a shadow over his face.

“Ma’am,” he croaked. “There’s a problem with the arrangement, if you could just come with me.”

Your mother rolled her eyes and sat you down in the chair with the wordless expectation for you to remain seated.

When they left the room, you laid your chin on the casket’s smooth wood. You looked down at your grandfather. He did look like he was just sleeping, nestled against silken cushions, and in his fanciest clothes.

“That bed looks much more comfortable than the one at the hospital,” you whispered.

Under the fluorescent lights, he'd asked you to lie with him in his starchy bed. You, the child oblivious to his suffering, obliged. You had never gotten to watch TV in bed before. But there, nestled under the crook of his arm against a paper gown and the tubes protruding from his skin, you watched a movie. You don't remember which one, but Tom Hanks was in it.

You reached your stubby arm into the casket and ran your fingers over gray veins on the back of his hand.

Those were the hands that taught you to tie your shoes, the ones that picked you up when you fell from horseback into grainy sawdust. The hands that brushed your hair and nursed your wounds.

And they were cold.

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**Fallen Angel**  
Art by Natalie Loos



# A Mother's Hands

*Nonfiction by Addie Coleman*

She's soft in the way she moves around the kitchen. I suspect it's the weight of her words that keeps her from floating clear off the earth—nothing else seems to be holding her down. She's cutting strawberries, and it feels like home in here. The tendons in her hands flex beneath the blue of her thinning skin, and I think about all that those hands have held. She is a mother. Not mine. Mine is gone. This mother—she made the one I love. And when I see her hands, I know they have held him more times than I ever will—in a way that I never could, because he's not in my blood. He runs through me in a different way. These are the hands of a woman who has lived long enough for her skin to sink into them. They are bones reaching for the sky—as if all of their acts come from above. They haven't idled since the hospital lights. Maybe it's all the knitting—or the giving—or the mending they do—of little broken hearts that love her as rampantly as she runs through their bloodstream—kin. My mother's hands never looked like that—fragile, sharp—she didn't have the privilege of hands that had aged. Hers were plump—soft—I can still remember falling into them. She runs through my bloodstream—begging to be poured out. And only sometimes—I let her overflow. Now—I've found myself here—watching this woman, only recently a stranger to me. But in her, I see my mother—floating around this kitchen—worlds apart. There's nothing in that weightless frame that reminds me of my mother—except those hands—a mother's hands—they all know each other well.

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# Untitled

*Photography by Mason Godwin*







**Remnants of Nature**  
*Photography by Jenna Futrell*





# Father Tongue

Poetry by Victoria Gonzalez

In my head, Spanish is a language  
round and smooth, of rolling  
and gliding like a stone over frozen  
lake. Pero, en mi boca, las palabras  
son jagged and flat, como vidrio  
roto on my teeth, on my tongue.  
I was raised by these words extraños,  
by these words que no puedo hablar.

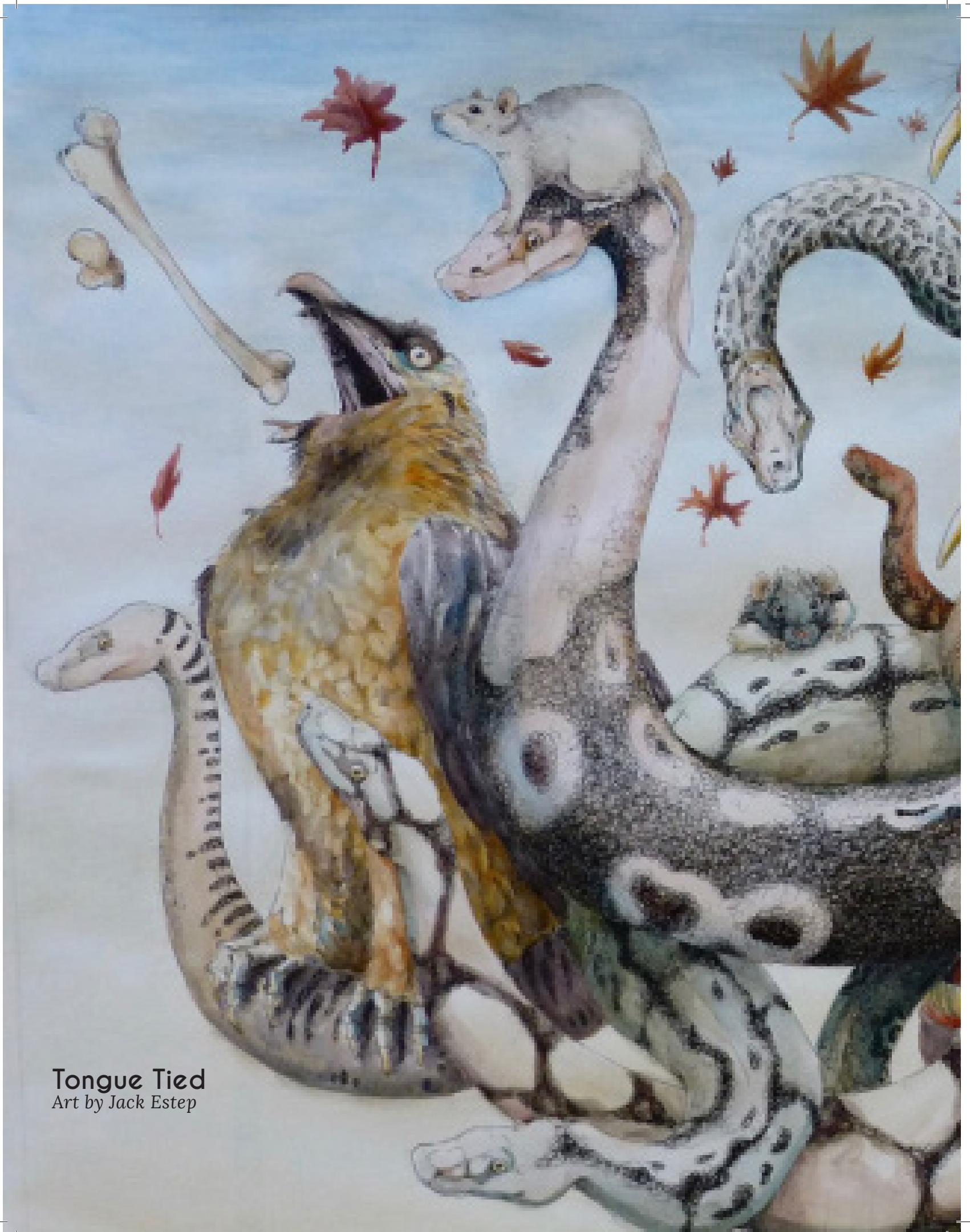
Spanish has been teasing me  
like sand between my fingers; a few grains  
stick in my palm, words I catch  
in kitchens: plátanos, frijoles negros,  
but most of the conversation slips  
through cracks, so fast,  
y mi padre lo habla y mi tío lo habla—  
but for me it is a fence I must squeeze  
through or climb over just to say,  
“Ojalá que puedas entenderme, abuelito.”

Porque Spanish is un leyenda  
my father did not pass down,  
but it haunts me, un fantasma  
that colors my skin, curls my hair,  
picks me out of the crowd,  
so people can question my americana  
pero yo so americana, born  
and raised in the south, where teachers  
say my name like broken glass.

Where my Spanish hid its face  
when the other Latinas would conversar,  
and reappeared for the white kids  
who asked for my tarea, for me to  
roll my “r’s.” My Spanish has whispered:  
“Estas limitada,” that I must write  
my thoughts in English, that I must pick  
a side of these walls, fronteras, barreras.  
It is the language in which I ask, “¿Quién  
soy yo?” It is the language in which  
I cannot answer.

But I will have patience—  
because sometimes, español is on the tip  
of my tongue, like the marcando  
de los “erres,” and sometimes my thoughts  
sing the song of espanglish, and sometimes  
when I’ve been studying, reading the same  
sentences over and over, las palabras  
become the waves, y las olas se vuelven  
a sea, that I can sink into, caressing  
the sound con mis dientes, con mi lengua  
saboreyendo las plátanos y las frijoles  
de Guatemala, de Carolina,  
de los padres de mi padre.

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**Tongue Tied**  
Art by Jack Estep





# Exhaust System

*Fiction by Gabrielle Girard*

The sodas are bright as neon signs in the convenience store coolers at 2:00 a.m. Layla shuffles her hands in the sleeves of her sweater, picks a box from the shelf. It's the size of Tylenol, thin cardboard. \$2.50, results in one to three minutes.

She moves like an astronaut, weightless after a long shift. The candy aisle is like walking down a comic book strip.

The first time she bought a pregnancy test, she grabbed a bunch of boxes and tried to mix it in like an afterthought. Now, she pictures the gelatin and food coloring, nuts and oily chocolate. Her stomach feels shallow.

She bleeds a coffee pot into a disposable cup. There are round lids with a little piece that snaps over the sip hole, no sleeves: save the environment. She has a community college paper to write on the dolphin frescos in Knossos, a quiz in tomorrow's sociology class, 8:00 a.m. She doubts anything is clean. She doesn't care.

At the counter, she watches the cashier's face for any sign of judgment. There are only two gas stations in the county. He is expressionless enough to be a mannequin. He wants \$5.75. She counts the change out, tips it into his hand. No, she doesn't need a bag.

"Save the environment," she says. Her voice sounds watery. He doesn't laugh.

The door jangles open with the night frigid behind it. She tucks the flat box into the armpit of her sweater, pockets her receipt, picks up the coffee, and turns. She almost walks into him. Her ex-boyfriend. Five years of her life. Jax.

She was sixteen, still easily spooked, waiting tables at Bob's BBQ, when she first met him.

It was after work in the back parking lot. Her feet felt like blimps. She had sat on the curb waiting for her sister to pick her up, thumbing through the dirty velvet dollar bills, counting tips.

The truck that pulled up had mud caked to the tires. The old man lurching out of the driver's seat said, "Sweetie, do you need a ride?" His breath smelled putrid, like the kombucha her mother fermented in the garage for bacterial gut health.

She didn't. She heard the truck door and then boots behind her. "Hey Sweetheart, hold on!" They didn't usually get out of the car. Cardiac muscle mass bulged in her throat, choking her.

She got to the back door, sirens in her head, dry disco ball eyes. Fingers gripped her elbow, pulled for her hip. She was bonier then. She had soft hair. She screamed.

The delivery boy who appeared among the dumpsters walked like he knew how to punch. His pants were dirty. "Get lost," he told the driver. He smelled like ash and bleach and vanilla. The way he planted his hand between her shoulder blades felt like she belonged to him.

"Are you okay?" he asked. His name tag patch said Jax.

She nodded. She didn't want anyone to touch her.

"Can I buy you a coffee?"

He watched her while she drank it. After that, he drove her home.

For a second, in the gas station, she freezes, dizzy with the white lights, the lottery tickets, and the hotdogs rolling in their glass case. Then she ducks her head and walks past him.

# Innocence

Art by Alaina M. Bubeck





The night feels shivery and good. The air is thick with running gasoline and engines and fumes. Her eyes are searing in her skull.

She can see him through the windows, surreal in the convenience store glow. He's chatting to the cashier. He has an industrial blue jacket pulled over his dark flannel.

She wobbles a little on the way to her car, sets her coffee on the hood, slides the key into the lock and jiggles it. The pregnancy test is slipping in her sweater. Jax bought the first one she ever used.

She was seventeen, googling pregnancy symptoms in Waffle House, unable to keep anything down. It was Saturday.

"You're just stressed out," Jax told her. He was always so sure.

She had filled out an application on the internet for an art school fifty miles away. Her jeans were full of paint. She had it in her hair. She had to get out. She could see herself as her mother, wearing pearl earrings on Sundays, belonging to her father, never leaving. "I can't have a baby," she said into her coffee cup.

The gas station door jingles. He swings when he walks, thumping a pack of cigarettes against his left palm. It will be Reds and nothing else; he's been quitting for five years.

"Hey," he says. "Layla. Wait."

Closer, she notices the thin lines of his sharp tattoos and his hair curling loose and damp against his neck, his baseball cap pulled down backwards.

"Hey." She smiles. Her voice is deeper now, stronger, full of cracks. She wonders if he sees the trenches under her eyes or how dirty her hair is.

"It's been a while," he says.

She bobs her head yes. "A while." She forgot about the little birthmark on his jaw. A year.

"Do you have a minute?" His shoulders look broader.

She thinks about the paper and the laundry and the quiz in the morning and her unfed cat. The drugs that got her through her shift are still gnawing a little at the parking space lines. "Sure."

They sit down on the curb. She pulls her knees in. He lights up. "Want one? What have you been up to? Still single?"

She leans in, lets him light it. She doesn't smoke habitually, never has, but her hands are shaking. The tip glows, flicks to ash. Her grandmother died of these. She sips her coffee, hot and sweet and burnt, dangles the cigarette over the parking lot.

She thinks about all the bottles of grocery store wine and the colors her hair has been and the dating apps she's drifted through and the parties and the other people she's kissed, scrubbing off memories of men with other men, refusing to belong to anyone. There's this nausea of guilt, sudden as morning sickness.

"Single, yeah. Just living. I got an apartment with some girls from work. Taking classes." Her life sounds empty, stuffed into words. "Doing some art stuff." She thinks of the doodles on receipt backs at the bar where she works now and the canvases behind the heels in her closet.

"I've missed you," he says. She wonders if he notices how dilated her pupils are. His eyes are just how she remembers them, soft as the night she left him. He wipes his lip on his thumb. "I got a job driving trucks. I'm moving to North Dakota in a week."

"North Dakota," she echoes. Her cigarette is out. She thinks about him really gone, grinds the nub of it on the sidewalk.

"Don't have to." He grins like he's joking, spreads his arms out wide. "I can be anywhere. You know how I feel about you."

She leans back, sidewalk biting her palms. "Still? You don't know me anymore." She can feel

the truth curled in her belly. He would think she was dirty if he did.

“Well, call me some time,” he says. He has this way of talking slow. He’s writing his number on her coffee cup with a ballpoint from his pocket, like he knows she doesn’t still have it in her phone. She doesn’t get how he doesn’t hate her. “I’ll double-check.”

“I should go,” she says softly.

He flips out his keys. For the first time, she notices his Volvo, parked crooked by the car wash. It’s old, blue with a sunroof. The seats are velour. There is always soda in the cupholders.

She was sixteen. They were making out in the backseat. It was dark. He pressed his lips into her neck too hard. She was tired. She didn’t like it. She thought about the junior year homework at the bottom of her backpack. She hoped there would be no purple marks this time, developed like latent fingerprints down her throat. She watched the stars through the skylight, little points, spattered like toothpaste on the bathroom mirror. She could get out at any point. She could burst into the street and run.

“You okay?” he asked. He closed his hand over her knee, brushed her hair out of her eyes gently. He had strong hands, fingers melted and hardened with callouses like cut rock candy. Hands like her father’s. She stared at the dark scab on his third knuckle.

The first time she saw him hit someone was in the parking lot after a high school football game. The guy had been wiry and rough, talking about parts missing from the auto repair, talking about drugs. Jax had moved like he was just breaking down a cardboard box on the job. It had made a sick sound. Afterward, he had shaken out his shoulder like a baseball player. When he turned around, he was soft as a spent storm cloud. He had pulled open the passenger door of his car for her.

Then, she hadn’t wanted to get in. Now, the ra-

dio was soft, blurred in with the sound of heater. Home was loud. “Yeah, I’m all right.” She stayed.

Jax stands up from the gas station curb first, holds out a hand to help her up. She lets him, almost without thinking. His hands are the same.

“Bye,” she says. “Nice to see you.” She means it, somehow. She can feel him watching her walk away. The pregnancy test in its box is slipping down to her elbow. She relaxes her aching arm in her sweater and lets it fall on purpose, lets him see it. She sinks down to pick it back up and then keeps walking.

Her car starts easily tonight, headlights eating the road. She doesn’t dare blink.

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# I Think About Our Bodies

*Nonfiction by Melissa Newcity*

When I think about death, I think about the cancer that took my father—first skin cancer, then localized lung cancer, and finally, rectal cancer. I think about the thin tube shoved up his urethra so he wouldn't piss himself. I never saw it, but my father made sure that everyone was aware of how uncomfortable it was. He weighed as much as a ten-year-old boy and griped when he needed food, water, or our undying attention.

He received as much kindness as time would allow because no one wanted to regret denying him the last crumbs of pleasure.

I tried picturing myself in my father's position, sleeping inside of a machine and waking in between pills or bathroom breaks: I could hear the relieved expressions of the family at the end of a cellphone—the cold hallelujah—after I was finally admitted to hospice. I could wish for one more day to give my love and repay my debts.



## Milk And Honey

Art by Anna Lawrence



But in the grand empty face of Death, Dad never stopped making excuses. In our last moments together, as I hovered over his child-like body, he never apologized for missing fatherly opportunities like kindergarten soccer games, or the high school art shows, or visiting me in the hospital after I overdosed on my medication. My father was never remorseful even though the preacher at the funeral said his only regret was never spending enough time with his girls.

In the pews, I saw the release on my sisters' faces, but I knew Death did not hasten my father

to make up for the love he never provided. Death never changed him. I remember feeling angry because I held him responsible—as my father and the first person to die in my life—for explaining how grieving worked, and I was going about it all wrong. It didn't make sense how relieved I was that Dad was out of my life. I couldn't stomach the guilt associated with his absence.

Coming home from the funeral, I expressed my grief in private within my journals and poetry. Looking back at them now, I notice my tendencies to dress up his death with angry and unnecessary

significance. At one point, I compared my relationship with Dad to a dead basil plant on my back porch. I never watered it, and I wasn't surprised it died, but I expected it to grow at some point. I planned for pesto and garnishing flatbreads, hoping for weeks that the plant would bear more than just a few sprigs.

Eventually, I scrapped the poem, but not after sharing the basil metaphor with my half-brother, Steven, who had grown up with a different father. I was grateful for his company because he reserved his moral judgments about my father and how I should grieve. As a joke, Steven and I referred to the basil plant as "Dad" because of how I obsessively focused on the comparison. Ironically, after a series of rainstorms, "Dad" resurreicted and then perished from his terracotta grave three times within a few months. Each time "Dad" perked up or wilted, Steven and I threw our hands up, saying, "Dad's back again," or "Dad's died again," as if a floppy basil plant provided enough reason for celebration. Eventually, laughing about it felt straightforward and cleansing. By diluting my grief, I could breathe comfortably again.

The Christmas after Dad died, I spent the holidays at home in Savannah with my mother and my stepfather, Jess. As I helped decorate the house with Mom, Jess fiddled in his workshop, strung the Christmas lights along the roof, built a fire for us with the wood he cut, and finally came in for supper. He didn't speak much outside of the dry jokes he made over meals, but the chickens were always fed, the garden beds always weeded, and the grass always neatly cut. I remember when I set the table, Mom made me promise that after she died, I was to make sure that Jess set out the nativity scene each Christmas. I imagined my stepfather holding the tiny porcelain faces in his papery hands and how we might wait until after New Year's to pack their tired, dented shapes into the attic. I imagined that, in Jess's grief, his lilies and roses would

brown and rot in their flowerbeds without his reliable care.

Thinking about it now, my partner, Brian, and I are only in our mid-twenties. So, we figure the idea of dying won't apply to us until we begin balancing good versus bad cholesterol. Because Brian works on computers for a living, he likens growing old and dying to a piece of equipment reaching the end of its life cycle. If you maintain your virus protection and occasionally defrag your files, your hard drive should have a long and productive run. In human terms, it means Brian knocks back a plethora of rainbow vitamins every morning, while I write poems and stories to keep up my resistance. However, we continuously overlook our inability to replace our bodies with newer bodies until we discover that a friend of a friend dies suddenly from a freak accident or complication. Unlike Mom, I don't know if I could prepare Brian for my unavoidable end—if I could survive that kind of loneliness with only a funeral keeping us apart. I always believed that, in the last decades of our life, Brian and I would join a church out of fear of Hell's judgment. I can picture us in Sunday school, surrounded by oily white concrete walls and eating stale shortbread cookies. When we stand and rise for service, I imagine an ocean of faces singing half-hearted hymns. I still don't understand how people spend their entire lives being good people and doing good things, knowing it might not be enough to get them into Heaven without repenting for their sins. I imagine God would eventually get sick of me asking for forgiveness. I half suspect I have exceeded my allotment for mercy, landing me undoubtedly in the red.

Regardless of which afterlife I wind up in, I believe that Brian lives inside my body because that is where I think about him. I exist inside Brian because he thinks about me. It's easier to imagine us as corpses: lying side by side, in pieces, under some dark and lonely plot. The residual molecular emotions float inside our brains

and in our muscles, even after our minds vacate their vessels. Our universes may end mid-sigh, mid-shit or worse, mid-word with only a void beyond our unfinished breaths, but I choose to believe our experiences serve a higher purpose in the grand scheme of the universe—mandated by some deity or not. I don't know if I could watch my stepfather cry over porcelain faces after Mom dies, knowing that despite his beliefs, she may not be watching over us in Heaven. Who am I to tell him he won't see her again? Jess will need the broken hallelujahs we sing in the hymns to cope with losing my mother, just as I needed the uncomfortable relief I felt when Dad died to understand the different shapes absence takes and how we, as the living, fill them.

I feel the weight of Dad's absence around the anniversary of his passing. I never wrote down the date, but within weeks of the anniversary, I always purchase a basil plant from the supermarket for some recipe involving pesto. When I realize what time of the year it is, remembering my awful poem and the running jokes associated with it, I cannot bring myself to discard the basil after I've twisted off all its fragrant leaves.

Three years later, I have yet to cultivate a green thumb. I plant the herb in a cheap plastic pot, never water it, and hope for a fruitful harvest. Even if the basil dies every time, I like to think that I at least tried to remember Dad. When he was alive, he never taught me how to properly mourn. Now, I'm unsure if my grievances died along with him—or even if they were supposed to. This year, the basil plant sits on a window sill, withering under the callous palm of winter. The dry and brittle stems cannot hold buds of love or hate. The stems are hollow, and it is the absence I mourn, not just the blooms.

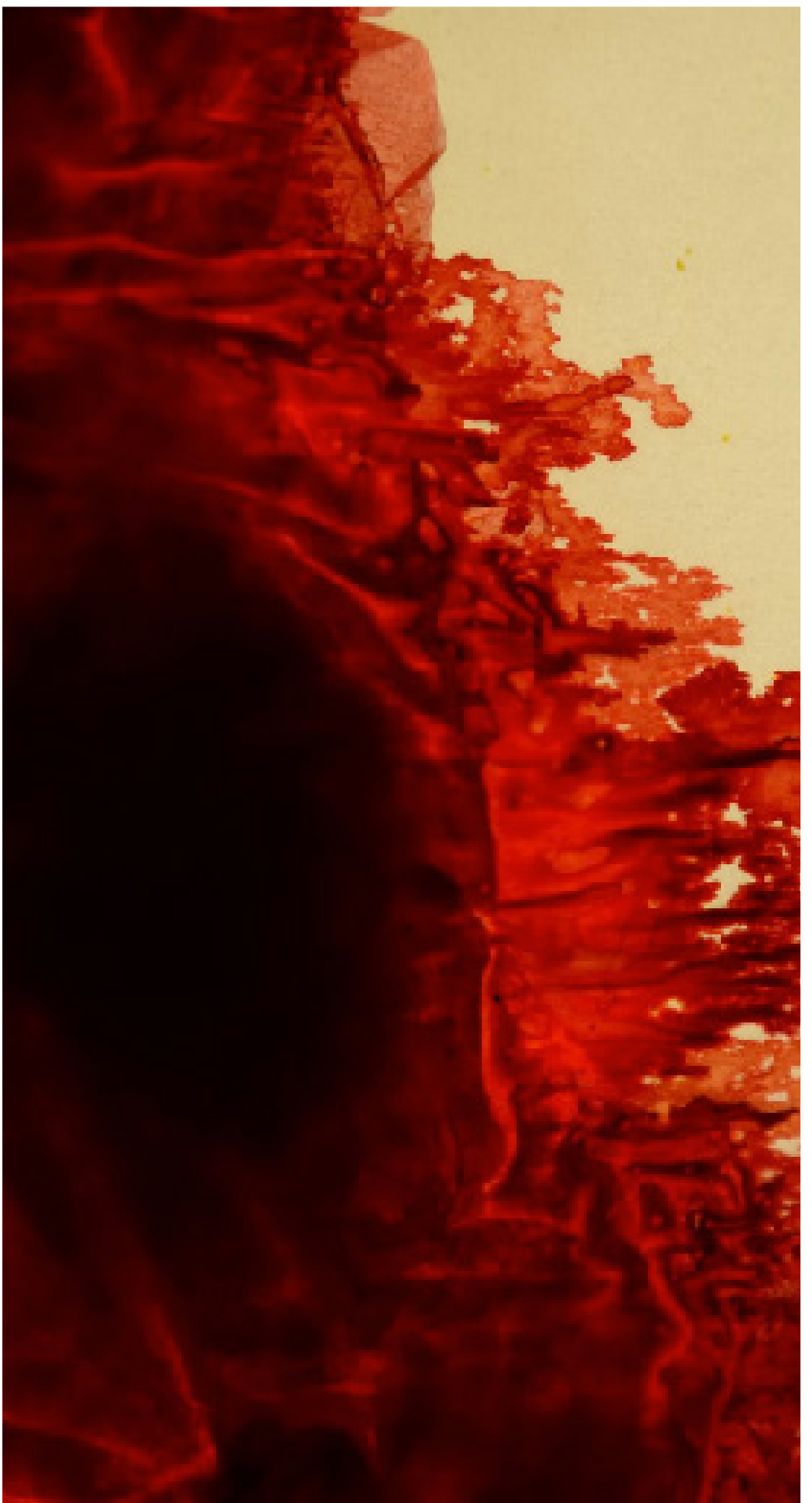
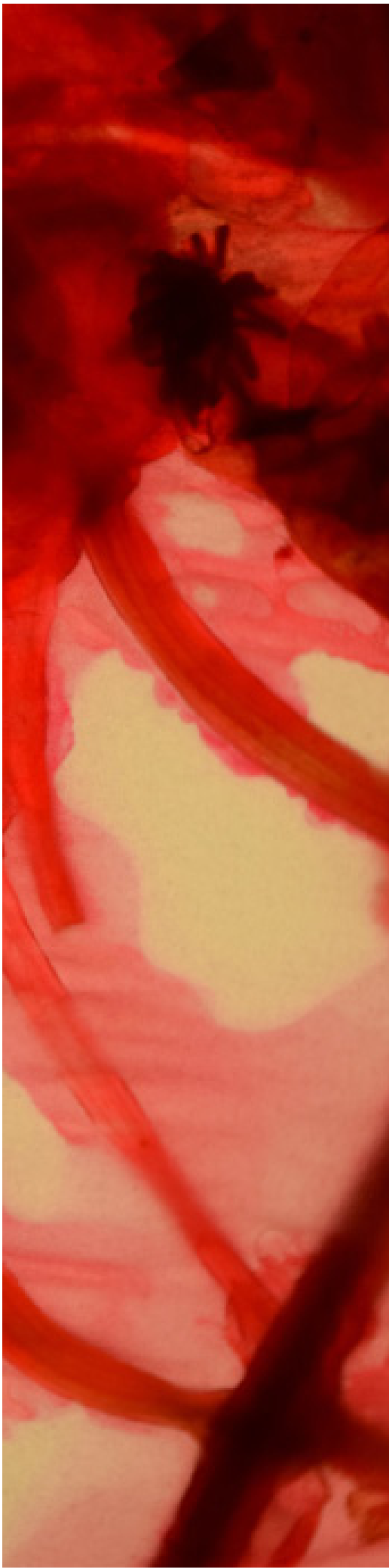
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# Untitled

Photography series by Caitlin Cloninger





# Only A Year

Fiction by Emma Sidoli

*149 days after Peter came back.*

A loosely scrawled count written on the top of every page in the journal hidden under the mattress. James had long since given up on sleep as Peter snored restlessly. Less than a foot away, though James felt farther away than he had with an ocean separating them. He wondered how Peter slept, what he dreamed of.

If he could decipher the difference between reality and dreams.

Which one he preferred.

Any moment now, Peter would be torn from sleep, thrashing and yelling out guttural cries. Maybe his hands would go around his own neck again, or James's this time.

James closed his eyes, trying to picture the war for the thousandth time. He saw people in uniform, toy soldiers, almost. Slow motion explosions in grainy film. He was enrolled in a creative writing course because he prided himself on his imagination, but he couldn't reach that far. It was too abstract a concept in this small suburban town, a town rejoicing the return of its soldiers. Where Peter faced dozens of warm greetings and expressions of flimsy gratitude every time he ventured out to the supermarket, or even to the mailbox. A sharp contrast from the footage he'd seen on the television, the things Peter had experienced. The things James could never experience.

He looked over at the sleeping man. Peter had been a boy when he'd left. The stranger with too-stiff fingers and hidden scars had lost all resemblance to the twenty-four-year-old he had been before. James could almost believe he was the same, when Peter was asleep. His face was free of stress; there were no visible purple shadows under his eyes in the dark. He had the same unkempt, sandy-colored hair, and his eyes, barely visible

through the occasional twitch of his lids, would always be that discerning shade of blue. But it seemed as though his mouth had forgotten what it meant to smile.

James hated himself for not recognizing the man he claimed to love.

Sometimes, Peter seemed too broken to go on. The daily aspects of life seemed unfamiliar under his touch. He flinched when James reached for him, ducked when there was even the slightest sound. He hadn't left the house. His insatiable need to be in constant motion had been put on pause as the tools he'd left out before the war gathered dust and unfinished projects around the house remained deserted. His limp was getting worse, and he never seemed to look directly at anything. It was impossible to pretend that everything was fine, and James was tired of trying. He'd been dancing around the mess that was their life ever since Peter had come back.

Peter come back.

*216 days after Peter left.*

James kept a count up on the chalkboard. It hung over the kitchen counter, a constant reminder of how long it had been since he'd sent Peter off with a gruff handshake and tears he'd had to violently blink away. He kept the letters hidden under his bed springs, though the words were stilted and shouted of heterosexuality. He had certain parts underlined, the ones with love hidden amongst the sentences.

I miss home.

Keep yourself safe.

Are we looking at the same stars?

Peter spoke of his platoon, more about the other soldiers than himself. The card games they played to pass the time, the ways they bullshit-

ted through the fear of the jungle. Mathews, who kept his wife's picture in the sole of his boot, and Davidson, with a token from every girlfriend he had back home. James knew that Peter talked about him as "his girl back home" too, if he brought him up at all. So, James counted the days, read the coded letters, and spoke of Peter as if he were merely a good friend gone to serve.

He watched the television every night, praying that Peter's name wouldn't pop up, hating himself for being able to be so safe. James had begged him to enroll in a few classes, to be safe a while longer before the draft was revised out of necessity, but he'd refused. It went unsaid, but James knew Peter would never flinch away from something he considered his responsibility. Peter wasn't capable of putting himself first.

Sometimes, James looked at the stars and wondered how different they were in Vietnam.

*31 days before Peter left.*

The draft. They both knew it was coming. They took walks and talked about it in a detached way, like a random news piece they'd heard on the radio. James thought of it with every free moment he had, and he wasn't even the one whose life was in question. They both called relatives regularly, reassuring them of Peter's moderate freedom. But it came anyway. And seeing it, knowing it with a terrible certainty, was another thing altogether.

Burn it, James had thought desperately. It was a crazy thought, a hopeless thought. But it had dwelled in his mind as he watched the letter sit with mock innocence on the table.

A few months ago, they'd joked about what they would do to escape this. Peter had a handful of buddies who'd already gotten that little scrap of paper, and James remembered slouching deep into a bar stool while half-serious comments about moving to Canada grew louder and louder with every passing minute. A few had swallowed cotton balls so a shadow would show on the x-ray, or knocked back some drink that promised harmless blood when they pissed. "Draft dodgers," Peter called them, letting it slip out when they got home, the words bitter and acidic on his tongue.

For a moment, before James turned the corner to the living room, he thought about making a joke now. Maybe Peter would let out one of his reluctant laughs and shake his head, respond with a much better joke and finally look up. But when Peter sat still as a statue with slumped shoulders, looking smaller than he ever had, James felt the words die on his tongue.

*399 days after Peter left.*

Barely legible with the other dates crowding the chalkboard. The bed was unmade. The house was littered with garbage. Scraps of paper covered in water stains and bits of handwriting decorated the floors and furniture. The small living room space was the only clean area in the house. There were a few dusty tools on the center of the crooked table, carelessly placed, perfectly preserved.

James sat on the stairs with the cheapest bottle of whiskey he could find and the chalkboard loose in his hands. Peter had promised so many things, but this was the one that mattered the most. No more than twelve months, 365 days That's the average length for a tour; I'll be back before you know it, I promise. I love you. I'll be safe. I'll be safe and I love you. You love me, and I'll be safe for you. We love each other, and that's not safe.

No letters in over a month. Nothing. And James had been digging himself a hole with a shovel made of broken bottles, torn up letters serving as dirt. He told himself it was because of worry, a paralyzing fear that Peter had broken every promise he'd made; and it was. But James was almost more terrified of Peter coming home. He wandered listlessly through the days, rereading the dozens of notes he'd received and not entirely destroyed quite yet. It seemed to him as if the newer letters were penned by a different person. His Peter was left behind in the words that were written months ago; the soldier loomed in the wooden, emotionless sentences. Don't come back he wanted to scream. Not like this.

*334 days before Peter left.*

Before there was a reason to count the days.

James struggled to keep the star on top of the

*Continued on page 29*



# Glorious

*Photography by Elizabeth M. Williams*





sparse, small tree. It was over half the size of the runt pine tree, somehow managing to look even dingier compared to the battery-operated green and red lights in the needles. Looking at it, in the middle of the well-decorated house, it stood out horribly.

Peter loved it immediately. He had to be shoved away from it, so he wouldn't stain it with the oil from his permanently dark fingers. They used an old American flag as a tree skirt, and James didn't even feel the need to make any excuses for it. Besides, there was always next year.

They said that every year.

Looking in the windows of the big stores on the street, five blocks down with the garish trees that sparkled too intensely for them to feel real envy. Next year, murmured when reassurances were needed, or as a private joke. They never meant it—they loved what they had. Loved the jokes about how size didn't matter, and accidentally shifting the star, causing the whole set up to collapse. Passing over trees they could finally afford in favor of the ones that couldn't reach their knees. Next year, said fondly over a Christmas dinner of grilled cheese and watery tomato soup. Even when their presents were wrapped with newspapers and had to be placed next to the tree because they wouldn't fit underneath.

The tree stayed set up well into the new year, when the other decorations were in boxes at the foot of the stairs.

*One day before.*

The bags sat to the right of the door, reminding James time and again of how powerless he was. They kept up the facade of happiness, laughter straining to fill the ever-growing cracks in their stiff conversations. Throughout dinner, their tangled hands were rigid, the hold almost painful. They repeated the same phrases like a mantra;

I love you.

I'll miss you.

Only a year.

Those types of things couldn't be written in the letters they'd send. Their letters would be between friends—brothers. Talking about life, talking around life. So they repeated the sentences without emotion and watched the bags with false smiles and faraway eyes.

*24 hours after Peter left.*

The hours passed quickly because it hardly seemed real. James kept expecting Peter to saunter through the door, his hands covered in motor oil and that lazy smile draped across his face. He would talk about his day. Bring home parts of old engines and set them on the table, laughing at the protests that ensued. But he was gone.

Only a year. Not that long. Barely anything, a memory they'd look back on in a decade and grimace at the hazy fragments of what they'd purposely forgotten. Something they could maybe smile at, to revel in knowing that they had made it. 364 days. He wrote the number one on the chalkboard with shaking fingers.

James had already tried writing a letter. It was tattered and mangled from being clenched in his fist, sentences darkly scratched out. He wanted to trace out I miss you on the paper over and over again. But he didn't. He wore Peter's blue button-up to his classes. He drew blood from his palms, fingernails embedded in his own skin, while his classmates rejoiced in their freedom. He ate dinner alone for the first time in years and went to sleep with Peter's pillow clutched to his chest.

*One hour after Peter came back.*

Every second scraped by with no reason to count them. They waited until they were in the car to reunite properly. The airport had been a brief one-armed hug, both breathing each other in. Peter smelled like the hospital he'd been stuck in for months. His limp was barely noticeable, but James saw his jaw tense with pain. The drive was filled with meaningless chatter. Peter only talked

of the hospital and James pretended not to notice.

They'd both hesitated before going into the house.

Peter was undeniably different, but he was still Peter. James loved him and ignored how his smile didn't reach his eyes, how the shut of the door made him jump. He wanted to show him the clean chalkboard, explain what it meant and should still mean. He wanted to try to force the good emotions to the surface. Happiness? Triumph? The words sounded empty and hollow in his mind, as Peter looked unsure of where to stand in a house he'd lived in for four years. James tried to make dinner; neither of them ate a bite. It's going to get better. We got past the war. We can get past this. We just have to remember how to love each other.

Peter went to bed early, but he laid there silently, over the covers. He kept his shoes on, tightly laced. The absence of snoring told James that neither of them slept.

It's going to get better. It has to.

*150 days after Peter came back.*

They ate breakfast in comfortless silence. James got ready for his classes and Peter washed the dishes. James said goodbye with a soft hand on Peter's shoulder. They both walked out the door, turned opposite ways on the street. James watched him walk away, his limp barely noticeable. He thought he heard a whistle float through the air. His fears from the night before were easily banished by daylight. There was so much room for possibility; Peter's hand in his pocket as he ruffled his hair with the other, the sun reflecting off of his watch. James could feel the beginnings of hope creep back in.

He pulled the medal back out of his pocket. He'd only seen it twice; for a split second when it was slipped into the bedside table five months ago, and when Peter gave it to him before breakfast, with the slightest of smiles. Keep it safe, he'd said, for me. His thumb traced the engravings and he imagined that Peter would be waiting at home in a few hours with his old smirk and everything would be as if the last year and a half had never happened.

It was a nice fantasy.

•





# Hinterland

*Poetry by Callie N. Stewart*

Yesterday I saw my father  
in the woods. Leaves held  
their breath, and the wind grew  
still. Birds fell into prophetic  
silence at the arrival of his hawk  
nose and painted face.

As I stepped toward him, he became  
the sway of pines, slipped ahead  
black boots soundless  
against the needle-quilted floor.  
I followed, heel-toe, heel-toe,  
my hand lifted to touch—  
He vanished sideways  
through brush, into  
sunrays. I bit my tongue  
against his name.

If I learned one thing  
from him, it's not to spook  
a wild animal or the silent specter  
that discovers the path.  
I've never been a sunray,  
but there's a wilderness that flows  
into my feet until my footfall  
matches his against the dirt.  
My heart gives me away, pounds  
in the base of my throat, echoes  
against the backs of my eyes.  
My father is where he belongs  
and I am hunting still.

•



**Earth, Fire, & Water**  
*Art series by Timothy Boardman*





# You Don't Get To Keep Her

*Nonfiction by Jacob Wesley Mills*

You will learn a great many things when she is gone. First, you will learn that you are not invincible. You will learn that some killers stand five feet three inches tall, drink pink Moscato, and sleep in your bed. You will learn that more damage can be done with a cold shoulder than with the cruelest words in the English language.

You will learn that there is a particular type of loss that occurs in losing a lover. This loss is swift, and it is complete. It will take her smile, it will take the heat of her body from next to you in the night, and it will take that look in her eye that both terrified and comforted you.

What you will be left with is silence, and you will sit in this silence and examine every word that passed between your lips. You will lie awake at night with all of the horrors of your heart, and sometimes you will sleep. But too often you will dream of her, and you will wake utterly exhausted.

You will take to drink, or to smoke, or to some other vice that makes the slowly creeping hours and minutes seem more bearable. You will call her when it's late and you are too fucked up to know better. You will find that she has blocked your number.

You will take new lovers, and they will have different names and different faces, but you will find only her absence in their presence. You will use them because you feel used. You will hurt them because you are hurting. You will start a lot of things but be unable to finish, and you will blame fatigue or stress or illness. But you will know the truth, and at some point, so will they. After, some will ask you what the act had meant. You will wonder the same thing.

You will think back to that thing your psychology professor said, the thing about love being a lie we tell ourselves in order to procreate. You will wonder if he was right.

You will read bad poetry, and then you will write bad poetry. You will pick up the guitar that

has been sitting in the corner, gathering dust, and you will pluck around until you find some chords that sound like the way you feel. You will go out and buy some blues records, and you will learn that there are things in this world that can only be moaned away. You will moan until you begin to feel better.

You will learn that books are good company. You will learn that they tell you things that your friends don't have the stomach to. You will learn that the men and women who wrote those books were broken and scared like you. This will help some, the comfort of mutual anguish.

You will begin to learn about yourself, too. You will learn to juggle. You will learn to sew on a button. You will learn how to make a frittata, and you will smile again. You will learn that life doesn't always get better, but that it always keeps going. You will remember that there was a you before her, and you will learn to be a better version of yourself now that she has gone.

She will text you that she misses you. She will show up at your apartment in a raincoat and lingerie, and you will have the best sex of your life while trying not to cry. You will take her back, because of course you will. She will leave again, because of course she will. Because it was a mistake. You will find that losing her hurts worse the second time.

Finally, you will learn that you don't get to keep her. You will learn that she was never yours any more than any of us are anyone else's—that the very body you inhabit is only on lease. What you will keep are the memories. The old cigar box that houses your watch and your father's lighter will also house photographs of the two of you and letters scrawled in feminine ink that prove you were loved. It will feel good having the memories there and not in your head. Something like closure. You will take them out and look at them from time to time, and then you won't.

•

**Dimensions of Grief**

*Photography by Alexandra Bostic*





**Embrace**  
*Art by Christian Happel*

# Butterfly in Sun-Flower Field

Art by William King Ricks





## Poetry by Edison Angelbello

# Jazz Hands

Art by Mirelys Colón



# Contributors

**Edison Angelbello** is a writer, filmmaker, and student at UNC Charlotte whose work often circles around topics of childhood and mortality. He has also worked with non-profits making marketing media content, and he enjoys the process of telling stories—both real and imagined. Edison has had poetry and short fiction published by Sanskrit Literary Arts Magazine.

**Timothy Boardman** is an NC-based artist. He currently goes to UNCG, where he is pursuing a major in printmaking and drawing, and he previously studied at Central Piedmont Community College, where he obtained an AFA and AA. He's been in a number of shows, including juried student shows and competitions. He has also curated and installed shows. He is currently working on a small printing business focused on providing accessible and affordable art in multiple formats, called Artimis Studio, a venture he started with sales from his previous shows' success. Follow him on Instagram @ArtimisStudio.

**Alexandra Bostic** is a conceptual artist and designer who uses various forms and mediums to explore themes of memory, consciousness, perception, and the natural world. She graduated from ASU with a BFA in graphic design in 2018. Alexandra also has a background in outdoor experiential education, which has a heavy influence on her philosophy of life, her work, and her art. How does one capture fleeting moments? How do we honor the essence of memory?

**Alaina M. Bubeck** is currently a sophomore at UNCW. Alaina is majoring in studio art and minoring in art history. For as long as she can remember, she has been in love with creating art. Alaina aspires to become a high school visual arts teacher. Alaina was included in the 2018 Atlantis Spring issue with her white charcoal on black paper piece titled "Impossible." Art is Alaina's passion in life, and she looks forward to more great artwork ahead.

**Caitlin Cloninger** is an artist from East TN currently residing in NC, where she is pursuing her MFA at UNCG. She has exhibited nationally. Her work has appeared in The Woven Tale Press, ART-POST Mag, and F-Stop Magazine, just to name a select few. She was also a recent artist-in-residence at Azule in Hot Springs, NC. Her primary medium of choice is photography.

**Addie Coleman** is a rising senior at UNC. She studies sociology as well as society and management. She is interested in the field of public health and aspires to be an advocate for people afflicted by interpersonal violence. Writing is her creative escape.

**Mirelys Colón** is a senior illustration student at UNCC graduating in May. Her interest in art started when she was a child, drawing whatever she saw on TV. She enjoys working in a wide range of mediums including acrylic, watercolor, gouache, and digital. Her work combines fantasy themes, Hispanic culture, and themes of

empowering women. Inspired by comics, video games, and animation, Mirelys hopes to create her own narratives one day and share them with the people around her.

**Drew Davey** has always had a unique perspective on our world and a desire for adventure. Growing up near the Outer Banks, he spent most of his years sailing and exploring. His journey has brought him here to UNCW, where he continues to sail, travel, and document unforgettable moments. Drew aims to capture modern adventures with old-school style. Film photography has given him the ability to show others a classic take on life through his lens.

**Jack Estep** is a twenty-year-old student artist currently attending Cape Fear Community College. He has done art all his life, showing immense talent and desire to create art ever since he was young. His favorite mediums to work in are pen and ink and watercolor. His use of color as well as fluid motion in his art are always what capture the eyes and hearts of the viewers and what manage to create fantastical scenery with the characters and worlds he has crafted in his head. Jack Estep plans to eventually move on to a four-year art university to continue his education in the fine arts.

**Jenna Futrell** is a freshman at UNCG majoring in studio art with a concentration in photography and a Wilmington, NC, native. Jenna is inspired by abandoned beauty and loves to get lost for the sake of her art. She exclusively shoots on film because of the challenge it presents the photographer. Jenna is inspired by two photographers in particular: Ansel Adams and Henri Cartier-Bresson. These two photographers have very different approaches to their craft, but she tries to incorporate both of their unique styles into her work. Jenna considers herself a "starving artist" because of her incessant craving for Chick-fil-A chicken sandwiches.

**Gabrielle Girard** is studying creative writing and studio art at Queens University of Charlotte. Outside of school, she serves coffee, writes articles, and slowly kills her potted plants. She is passionate about the intersection between language and visual art and the opportunity to communicate ideas creatively. She also loves cats.

**Mason Godwin** is a photographer and videographer based out of Wilmington, NC. He enjoys street photography and documentary filmmaking. Through these disciplines, he tries to capture the unique moments that happen each day. Mason is currently studying film at UNCW, and after graduating in May 2019, he wants to make documentary films.

**Victoria Gonzalez** is a senior at UNCW pursuing a degree in communication studies with a double minor in creative writing and Spanish. Victoria is passionate about the power of language, and in her free time, she writes fiction and poetry with this message in mind. She hopes for her work to inspire a sense of unity and con-

nectedness among the human family, despite the differences between our individual lives.

**Christian Happel** is a sculptor based out of Fayetteville, NC. He is currently enrolled in art classes at UNCP, where he has primarily focused on producing large-scale public artworks since 2016. He hopes to soon pursue a master's degree in sculpture with the goal of one day teaching at a university.

**Sara Izzi** is a senior at UNCW studying film and communication studies. She has been taking photos since she saved up for her own point-and-shoot camera in middle school. She sees photography as a way to have fun and get creative and hopes that her photos will show mundane objects in a new and unique light. When she isn't taking photos, she enjoys rock climbing, drinking hot tea, and working at the greenhouse on campus.

**Anna Lawrence** is a student at Cape Fear Community College. She's always had a desire to create, which has inspired her to explore a variety of mediums and techniques in her portfolio. Much of her artwork is inspired by her observations of nature, especially her experience with beekeeping. Her interest in honeybees has led her to make them a prominent subject in her work. When she's not working to capture the world around her, she's out enjoying it through hikes, walks on the beach, and cups of coffee downtown. She is planning to pursue a career in graphic design.

**Natalie Loos** is a student currently studying biochemistry at UNC. She is originally from Jacksonville, FL, but since moving to NC, she much prefers the weather and mountains up here. Although she enjoys the academia of science and math, art has always had a soft spot in her heart. It transcends our own optical realities and allows our eyes to speak a language our mouths may never know.

**Jacob Wesley Mills** lives and works in his hometown of Asheville, NC. In his free time, he enjoys writing, tinkering, fishing, and exploring the great outdoors with his canine companions. As a graduate of UNCW and a previous contributor to *Atlantis*, the author is always grateful to have his work appear in the publication where he got his start.

**Melissa Newcity** was born and raised in Savannah, GA. She is a BFA student focusing primarily on poetry and also serves as a staff member at UNCW's Watson College of Education. Although she is not vegetarian, the older Mel gets, the more she identifies with domestic birds like turkeys and chickens. She hopes to be a wild bird in her next life. In addition to *Atlantis*, Melissa has an upcoming publication

this spring in the University of Pittsburgh's *Collision Literary Magazine*.

**William King Ricks** is currently a freshman BFA student at UNCG. He was born and raised in NC. Will began drawing and painting before he could write. His father, Franklin, introduced him to art at an early age. Franklin passed away when Will was seven years old. His mother, Kim, has supported his artistic skills and goals ever since. Will was voted most artistic in his senior class at Northwest Guilford High School. His alma mater also proudly displays a hand-painted 5'x 5' mural, done by Will, in its hallway. Will hopes to inspire through his art.

**Dana Rossi** is a sophomore in her first year at UNCW as a transfer student, majoring in communication studies. In the past year, out of a curiosity for Photoshop and need for a new creative outlet, she combined her interest in graphic design with her love for photography and began creating collages. Throughout this year, she has continued to explore Photoshop and pursue photography to find new and interesting ways to highlight people and images through her art.

**Emma Sidoli** is a nineteen-year-old sophomore at UNCW majoring in creative writing with a concentration in fiction and working on getting a certificate in publishing. She's from Asheville, NC, and she wants to move to New York City to work at a publishing firm once she graduates. She loves horror movies and hoarding her dozens of shabby leather notebooks.

**Callie N. Stewart** is a student at UNCW and will graduate in May. She plans to spend the rest of her life studying, writing, and loving stories, while trying not to fall too deeply into debt. An essay, but after some encouragement from others he decided to turn it into a graphic novella.

**Catherine Whelan** has written stories her entire life, and she doesn't care for the word "normal." The redhead has a flare for gore, is obsessed with monsters, and thrives on sarcasm. Her sushi and her brothers are her favorite people in the world.

**Elizabeth M. Williams** is an artist and photographer who currently lives and works in the mountains and foothills of Western NC. She is a student pursuing a BFA in studio art and a minor in anthropology at ASU. She is interested in relationships, community, home, identity, wilderness, womanhood, and material culture and capitalism in the modern world.





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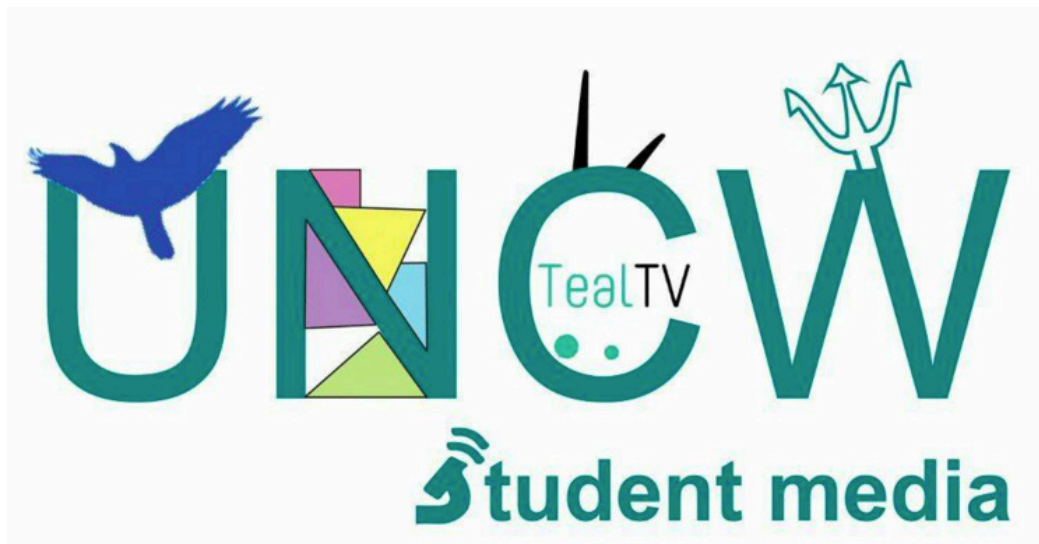
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To submit to *Atlantis*, you must currently be an undergraduate or graduate student at any public or private university or community college in North Carolina. Contributors may submit up to ten pieces of art, photography, nonfiction, fiction, or poetry.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

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# In Memory of Issue 79...

As many of our readers are aware, on September 14th, 2018, Hurricane Florence slammed the East Coast. Atlantis's home city of Wilmington, North Carolina, was in the very center of her path. UNCW called a mandatory evacuation September 10th, during a very critical time in the Atlantis production schedule. Each staff member was displaced for varied amounts of time, and some were even unable to return to their homes until very recently. Devastation impacted our coastal community in nearly every aspect. One of the minor impacts of the hurricane was our inability to produce a magazine for the semester. Issue 79 will remain unproduced for the history of Atlantis to remember what happened. This is issue 80. We endure and we continue to create.



