



ATLANTIS

a creative magazine

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Thank you for reading the eighty-first issue of Atlantis: A Creative Magazine. We hope you enjoy this online summer issue, as it is continuing a new tradition of annual summer publications. It warms my heart to know there is always an audience ready and eager to receive our magazine.

I'm struck again and again by the resilience of literature: its demand to continue and be heard. Storytelling is one of humanity's oldest traditions, a way to connect and outlast time itself, reaching through decades and centuries to touch another heart with its truth. I'm honored that Atlantis serves as a small, yet vital outlet for storytelling of all forms. Our magazine gives this generation's writers the chance to stand up and claim, "I am here."

This issue of Atlantis is heavy with life and loss. Ponder and question alongside our contributors; ache with the darkness they share on the page and rejoice in the light. Reconnect with words that seem simple in their overuse and yet still hold weight. Pain. Hope. Fear. Love. Acceptance. Grief. These feelings are the foundations we build ourselves up on. We are constantly relearning them, adding onto our personal definitions and painting them new colors. But let this issue be a source of comfort, one that shows how our complexities bind us together. We are vast as oceans, and we will never stop singing for those who are to come when we have gone.

I truly hope you enjoy this issue as much as our staff does. Let's continue to grow together, always fostering a home for literature—those who write it and those who read it—and for the voices ever-crying to be heard.

Cheers,

Tyler Anne Whichard

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Desolate
Photography by Olivia Norman





Reminiscence Rooms

Poetry by Natalia Conte

The room boasted a lace wedding dress,
turned from age to antique musk;
a washboard perched
in a yawning basin;
a baby doll cradled sightless
in a frilled white bassinet.

Nana liked the baby doll best;
she sifted frail fingers through
its synthetic strands.
She cooed at the thing,
and bothered the nurses into bringing extra cups
of applesauce,
for the little one.

The night after,
I dream of her honeymoon:
her waiflike body, drowned
in tulle, pitched over
my grandfather's shoulder like
a sack of mulch.

She murmured how she wanted a baby,
a boy to play *bam bam* with the
television cowboys.
Tonight why don't we, she slurred
between the ivory clicks of her heels
hanging from wine-softened fingertips.

Sometimes, she sings to me of Ireland,
cups my cheeks like a glass of fresh milk,
and reminds me how my face is just a mirror
time has stilled.

Lord how I want to cradle that sweet head,
run my fingers through the silver,
feed her applesauce by the spoonful,
and tell her of times before.

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Waikiki
Art by Dana Rossi



To Relieve the Pain

Fiction by Paul Kurzeja

I give her five drops to relieve the pain.

The hospice nurse was very specific: “Just five drops will ease pain and let her rest. It’s powerful. More could put her under too deeply; she could just fade away.”

She pressed the dropper bottle of morphine into my palm and locked eyes with me to convey the importance of her words.

“Do you understand?” she asked.

I nodded.

After that, we gave my mother the morphine every four hours along with oral syringes of nausea and anti-inflammatory medicine, water, and when possible, food paste. This became the routine once the cancer unit came to the end of its abilities and sent her home. My sister, Orie, came home then too, to be there for the last few days. That was over two weeks ago.

Mom was only semi-conscious when the hospice staff wheeled her through the front door on a rattling gurney. Soon after, she stopped responding altogether. Her stomach, liver, and other organs began to follow. She had loved food: manicotti and cannelloni, scallops and lobster tails, waffles and cinnamon buns. “Food is the stuff of life,” she would say as she pulled steaming lasagna from the oven or stirred a bubbling clam chowder. In the evenings, as I grew up, we gathered around the kitchen table most nights to share in her creations.

Chemo took her taste buds quickly, possibly the most devastating side effect for her, and certainly one that hastened the weight loss. Once the taste buds left, so did her desire to eat. Now, bitter liquids squeezed into her mouth were all that was left.

I look at the skeletal figure that lies in the bed, bones pushed against paper-thin skin as if trying to

break through. Each labored breath, aided by the oxygen line under her nose, brings a soft gurgle from her lungs. The sickly sweet smell of medicine and decay permeates the room. I hardly recognize the person who raised me, encouraged me, scolded me, and helped make me who I am. After two weeks of watching her waste away, I thought I had shed every tear.

Finishing the dose, I place the morphine on the nightstand next to an old picture of my college graduation. In the photo, I stand in cap and gown with Mom, plump and beaming, squeezed between Dad and my sister, arms around each other, broad smiles. In the background, the college chapel looms over our shoulders, its gothic arches and watchful steeple casting a shadow that falls just behind us.

With the eight o’clock routine done and nothing further needed until midnight, I head down the darkening hallway to the living room. The television flickers, illuminating Orie asleep on the couch. The oversized blue cushions seem to swallow her and make her look small and vulnerable, like the little sister of my childhood. Her long hair is splayed out in an arc over the cushion by her head. Gray strands mix with the black, a process that has accelerated in recent weeks.

When we were children, Mom would sometimes take us to the beach while Dad was at work. She would sit in an aluminum folding chair, cigarette smoldering in one hand and a paperback in the other. Usually a brawny, bare-chested man holding a voluptuous woman with flowing hair would gaze out suggestively from the book’s cover. I would wade into the surf holding little Orie by the hand. If a wave tumbled toward us that threatened to engulf her, I was just strong enough

to raise her up out of harm’s way, my arms straining and shaking. Mom would barely look up, assuming Orie was safe with me.

My sister stirs from her sleep and opens her eyes, puffy and bloodshot. On the end table by her head sits an empty wine glass, a few drops of red wine dried to its side like tears. Orie is usually not much of a drinker, but after a few days of watching Mom wither away, a drink is always at hand.

“Has Barry called?” she asks, her voice drowsy.

Her husband is a thousand miles away in Phoenix. Like my wife, he is at home with the kids. Orie misses them terribly, but kids aren’t ready for this stuff. They never will be.

“Not yet,” I say.

“Do you think Mom ever started to like him?”

I look away.

“Sure,” I say.

She rolls onto her side, closes her eyes, and presses deeper into the couch.

“Bullshit,” she mumbles.

She’s right. Orie met Barry while he was working at Dad’s accounting firm. “Orie can do better,” Mom would regularly declare. She had never been clear on why Barry fell short, but I’d always imagined that skinny accountants never graced the covers of her beach books. After they married, a silence fell between Mom and Orie. Only after the grandkids arrived did the ice break, but by then Orie was in Phoenix. And now it is too late.

Orie’s slow breath tells me she has fallen back asleep. I sit on the end of the couch and stare absently at the television on the wall. A late-night preacher in a dark suit and white-collared shirt drones on with a practiced sincerity. His sermon drifts around me. Right and wrong. Heaven and Hell.

I find the remote and flick through the channels, half in a daze. My fingers tire out on a law firm drama. It tumbles along toward the usual conclusion for such shows, the lawyers earnestly presenting their closing arguments about guilt or innocence—always so simple, so clear, by the end. I haul myself up from the couch to look for coffee.

In the kitchen, Dad sits at the Formica table, head bowed as if in prayer. A half-empty bowl of vegetable soup sits at his elbow, and the faint glow of the setting sun emanates from the window behind him. He looks up and nods a greeting; the skin under his chin, loose from age and recent weight loss, shaking along with his head. Drops of red soup decorate his white golf shirt. Over the last few months, his hands have begun to shake, so his clothes often evidence his latest meal. The doctor told him he was suffering from stress and fatigue, that he should get more rest. An easy prescription to give—a hard one to fill.

Although I have been living with Mom’s impending death for weeks, Dad has been living with it for over a year. That’s how long it has been since the cancer spread to her lymph nodes and blood. Painful, debilitating, and humiliating treatments followed. Dad was there for her through it all, day and night, in and out of the hospital, every moment of the slow decline. And finally, it is being here at this bitter end which seems to drain him most.

“How’s she doing?” he asks, always his first question.

“Sleeping comfortably,” I say. All she can do now, I think.

“Do you think we’ll hear from her again before . . .?”

His voice cracks and trails off.

“I don’t think we will,” I say. “Better she sleeps, anyway.”

He nods and looks down again. It has been a week since her last foggy words. Nothing profound or romantic, just confusion.

“Richard,” she said to my Dad, “turn the stove off, will you?”

My dad pushes away his soup bowl.

“I’m sorry you and your sister have to go through this,” he says. “It would have killed your mother to see us all like this.”

He pushes himself up from the table, his sagging figure appearing shorter than usual. He staggers for a step before catching himself on the back of the chair.

“Thanks for being here,” he says. “I couldn’t make it through this alone.” He gives a thin grin as he touches my shoulder. “I still might not.”

He shuffles toward the guest bedroom where he now sleeps. Normally a man capable of annoying levels of energy and optimism, he is now a shaking, thinning shell.

I give up on coffee and clean up the remains of his dinner, then retreat to the second guestroom to lay down. With my eyes closed, I can feel the weight of the house around me, pressing and dark. I can faintly hear the droning voices on the television; whether it is the talking head preaching of good and bad or the lawyers debating guilt or innocence, I can no longer tell. As I fade into sleep, I think I can feel my sister, scared and lonely on the couch; my father, dragging himself toward the inevitable end; and my mother, waiting and frightened in the darkness of her broken body.

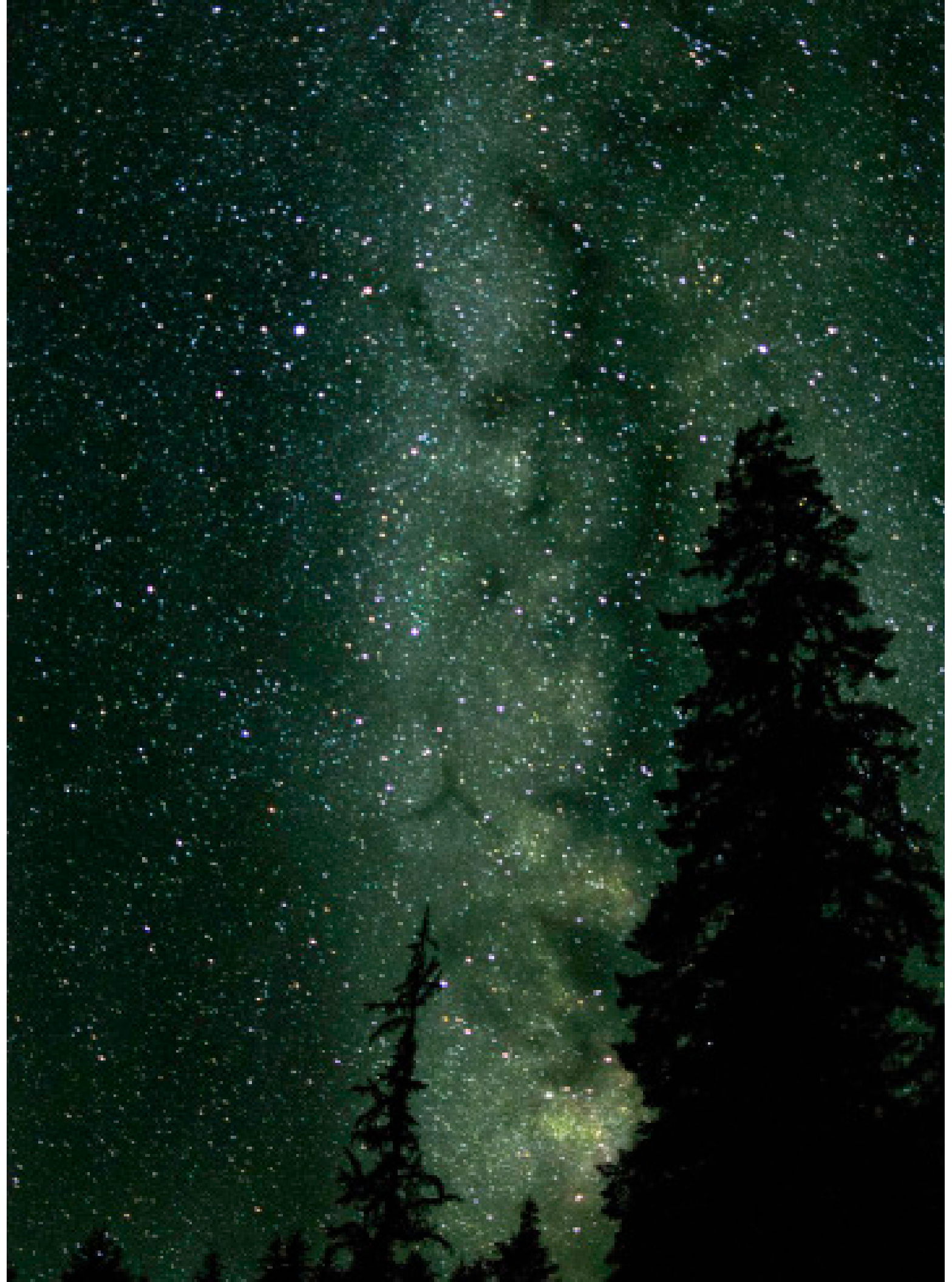
When I awake, my mind and the house are quiet. The voices from the living room, silent. I look at the glowing red numbers of the clock on the dresser—just before midnight. The next round of medicine is due.

I go into the bathroom, splash my face, and wash my hands. I walk through the house. In the living room my sister is still sprawled across the couch asleep. I press my ear to the guest bedroom; the sound of slow breathing confirms my father’s slumbering presence.

Finally, I think, he can get some rest.

I walk to my mother’s room; she lies as I left her: gurgling quietly at each breath. I pick up the morphine and give her five drops. Then I give her five more to relieve the pain.

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Tall as the Universe
Photography by Matt Biggs

A Tootsie Roll Life Preserver

Fiction by Gianna Spitaliere

The first time Julie eats lime tortilla chips is also the first time she watches Titanic.

The second time she eats lime tortilla chips, they sit in a great value plastic bag between her thighs. She drives down Interstate 74—cruise control set to eighty mph. It is 2:37 p.m., and she has been driving for almost three hours. Her daughter, Caroline, curls into her Frozen-themed blanket in the passenger seat next to her. Normally, she’s the mom who would judge other parents for letting their eight-year-old kids ride in the front seat. But today, that is the last thing on her mind.

“What was Grandma’s real name?” Caroline says.

The past tense still catches Julie by surprise.

“I thought you were sleeping,” Julie says.

“Yeah,” Caroline says, “I was. I’m not anymore.”

“Her name is— was—Carol,” Julie says. “That’s where your name came from.”

Julie can feel herself begin to crack. The water is slowly filling—sneaking—into her most vulnerable crevices.

Here’s the thing about how the Titanic sank: it didn’t just slowly fall into the water; it flipped upside down first. Everyone’s world’s upturned, forcing them to hang on by a thread while the world turned around them until they finally had to let go.

“Hm,” Caroline says, “I never knew you named me after her!”

“I’ve told you before,” Julie says. “You just don’t remember.”

“Do you remember all of Grandma’s Tootsie Rolls?” Caroline says.

Julie is quiet.

“Remember she always had at least five of those things on her. She was like a Tootsie Roll tree: if

you shook her, they’d probably just fall out,” Caroline says.

“One time,” Julie grins, “before you were born, I was unloading the washing machine for your grandmother, and all of her clothes were covered in this sticky film. I spent nearly thirty minutes attempting to find where it came from before ultimately realizing it was a Tootsie Roll stash in one of her jeans pockets.”

“That is so Grandma!” Caroline says.

Julie laughs, but with the laughs, some tears well into her eyes. The water is coming in. The more she thinks about her mom, the greater the cracks become. Her balance is lost. The tipping begins.

“How much longer until we get there?” Caroline says.

“Just about ten to fifteen minutes,” Julie says.

“If the funeral isn’t until tomorrow morning,” Caroline says, “what are we supposed to do there today?”

“We have to go through all of Grandma’s stuff,” Julie says. “I have to figure out what we want to keep, and what your aunt and uncle want.”

They arrive at Carol’s house ten minutes later. Julie’s sister and brother-in-law are already there. The house is littered with cardboard boxes and packing tape. Her mother’s entire life is being packed away into neat little boxes in the next twenty-four hours.

Julie tips over further. The right side of her body weighs down with water and grief. The left, barely gasping for air, waiting to be plunged down with the rest of her.

Caroline skips into the house. Still snuggling her blanket, she leaps into her aunt’s arms. This is a vacation to her.

Julie continues to wander the house. Every time she walks into her mom’s house, she is instantly greeted with the aroma of home-cooked meals and a warm kiss on the cheek. Today, however, she feels like she’s wandering through a sterile museum of what used to be. It makes her nauseous. She can’t tell if it’s the absence of comforting foods or the rising waters in her abdomen.

She reaches her childhood bedroom. “Julie” is stuck on the outside of the door in bubble letters, along with a strip of caution tape reading, “Keep Out.” She walks inside and finds everything the way she left it decades ago. Only now, a layer of dust settles atop her dresser and nightstand. She can see vacuum lines across the carpet and imagines her mom vacuuming her room for the last time, continuing to keep it clean in her absence.

She tips over to an almost impossible angle now. She is ninety degrees and ready to sink. Half of her fills with water; the other half hangs by a mere thread. She cracks into uniform lines like the carpet. She cannot hold on any longer.

“Mom!” Caroline shouts.

“Yeah?” Julie says.

“You have to come see this!” Caroline says. “Hurry up!”

This snaps Julie out of her sinking for a moment. She rushes to her daughter’s voice and finds her standing in front of a box that is sitting on top of the highest shelf in the laundry room. The box is labeled “Tootsie Rolls.”

“Look, Mom,” Caroline says, “Grandma had a whole box of Tootsie Rolls! Can you pull it down? I can’t reach!”

Julie stretches up toward the box. She tips past ninety now. She is nearly upside down. Her fingertips can barely reach the bottom of the box. She wiggles it toward the edge of the shelf. Her toes stretch to their tips. She is upside down, barely hanging from the tips of her fingers. Her entire body underwater, tumbling.

And then the box spills off the shelf. The Tootsie Rolls rain down from above, showering her and Caroline. She lets go now. She swims to the surface and finds herself soaking wet with tears and Tootsie Rolls.

“Grandma is with us,” Caroline says.

Julie is above the water now. With a fist full of candy keeping her afloat, she treads water as the ship sinks below her. She can see the rescue boat approaching in the distance.

“Yes,” Julie says. “Yes, she is.”

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What’s That Sound?

Nonfiction by Eleanor Nesimoglu

*Part I: There’s something happening here. What it is
ain’t exactly clear...*

Shooting can mean a number of things. There are sport shootings, domestic shootings, and mass shootings. There are shooting games and shooting sprees. You can shoot beams of magnificent light; you can shoot blanks. You can shoot film.

There are head shots, cheap shots, and winning shots. You can take down shots of whiskey, of gin. Shots, shots, until you’re numb, numb.

Bang, bang. Shots go off at a gun-range. Shots go off at a house, a school, a concert, a theatre. A church. An accidental discharge, suicide, murder, attack, massacre. An act of terrorism.

I first heard the word *shooting* in 1999, some-time after the Columbine high school tragedy. I was seven. I don’t remember the day itself. What I remember is being given a nonfiction piece later titled *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*. Unironically, it was given to my Catholic English class.

The story revolves around the life of a girl who was in the library when one of the shooters entered. He asked her if she believed in God, shot her point blank. Deemed a martyr— her answer, obviously yes.

As a child, there was no doubt in my mind: if someone held a gun to my head and asked me if I believed in God, my answer would have been identical.

Today, I would have a different answer. Not because “yes” was the wrong answer for Cassie, but because of numbers.

I want to measure my lifespan in violence by

counting the number of shootings since my birth year, but the amount is too vast. The many experiences and connections I’ve had with firearms blur together like stained glass from a distance. It is unclear where they start, end; sometimes unclear who are the perpetrators and who is innocent. Counting made me lose faith in a God.

I have been shot at a few times. I know the sound of gunfire. Fortunately, I only had to use the scope of my weapon overseas. In training, I executed buddy rushes and crawled under concertina wire as bullets spat by.

I know the shaking bang from a .22 rifle. I know what it is to look up at my stepbrother standing over me on a haybale. The shaking of the body, bullet passing head, closing arms around scars left by BBs.

Trauma was absent from training, apart from the familiar ghosts of my childhood. I practiced shooting with intensity. Closing my eyes, I can place myself back at any weapons range in any weather. I can hear the range control calling, “*Targets!*” I remember lying prone, inhaling hot brass fumes, grass, and dirt. I can still feel the genuine love and excitement I had for shooting. The thump in my chest when my relay was up. I can still feel the cool metal of my M-4. I used to sleep with it like a stuffed animal, swinging my leg over the buttstock.

I thought my college was being shot up. The alert system mistakenly issued an active shooter warning on campus. When it buzzed on my phone,

I was surprisingly calm. Then again, I heard no gunshots.

I wished I had a gun.

I told the other students to get away from the windows and spread out. I closed the blinds, assisted the teacher with the door lock, and told her to go out into the hall to bring students inside. When I told one student sitting at the desk in front of a window to move and he refused, my pulse rose with anger, not fear. Perhaps it is wrong that my first instinct is to arm myself. At the same time, the knowledge I can save people makes me never want another innocent to be killed.

Part II: There’s a man with a gun over there.

The day my Uncle Casey got shot, all I knew when I left for school was that his house had been broken into after a chain of attacks in the area. My mother told me not to tell anyone about our association with him, suggesting that it made us look like white trash.

Casey was my aunt’s ex-husband. Our relation dissolved through divorce. He was younger than my aunt, showed me how to use power tools, always had bottomless energy and a relentless sense of humor. When Casey and my aunt split, she moved out and he started dating a woman whose ex, Charles E. Wetzel Jr., turned out to be a murderer.

In what was deemed the Cross Plains Shooting, before going to my uncle’s house, Charles stopped by the house of another man who had loved his ex. He gunned down the man and his wife in front of their one-year-old son. He moved on to my uncle’s, where he shot his brother Craig dead. Casey was also hit but managed to run to the home of a local police officer. I haven’t seen him since, except online where he has one picture, like most uncles do.

I prevented a shooting.

After a rowdy wedding rehearsal dinner, my date Jake and I were finally ready to retire to our room with a pizza. When I passed the room of another bridesmaid,

I heard two men arguing. I noticed the open door. I looked in and saw Stephanie lying half-naked on the edge of the bed, completely incoherent. The man with her was plastered, arguing with the security guard.

I didn’t know Stephanie very well. However, I knew what a drunk girl looked like, and she looked closer to a dead girl. I walked into the room without hesitation.

“What’s happening?” I said.

Zeke, her date, was elated to see us.

“I know them!” he said.

The security guard looked at us for the first time.

“Do you know this girl?” he asked.

“I’m in the same wedding party,” I said.

“I need to try to talk to her,” he said. “He isn’t allowing me to.”

I took Zeke for a walk while Jake stayed with Steph and the security guard. Zeke followed me down the hallway, yelling the whole way how he didn’t do anything wrong, the mother of the groom didn’t want him at the wedding, he wasn’t that drunk. That I was the only person he trusted.

I told him I believed him. After growing up with alcoholics, I knew agreeing with drunk people is generally the right option.

“Let me put this pizza in my room quick,” I said. “Why don’t you sit?”

When I came back out, he was gone. I rushed back to Steph’s room where Jake was now yelling at him to “chill the fuck out.” Steph’s eyes were open, but I could tell she wasn’t seeing. The security guard said she told them she didn’t want to be there. That is when Zeke lost it.

“Well, what do you want me to do with this gun?” He went into his bag. I didn’t wait to see what he would retrieve.

I picked up Steph, trying to cover her with the bed sheet, and ran with her to my room; Jake followed. The unarmed guard ran to the front desk to call the police. Jake and I looked back into the hallway where Zeke stood, Glock at his side.

When the police showed up, they had dogs, SWAT gear, and automatic rifles. They stood in front

of my door, using my room as a safety retreat. I stood watching, eating my cold pizza. One policeman interviewed us, and Steph couldn't even remember her name. Later, it clicked with me that she could have been drugged. Zeke got arrested, and they found two guns, four full magazines, and three knives in his backpack. There was also a police badge, although he wasn't a cop.

I rarely visit home.

Part III: Tellin' me I've got to beware.

I have developed a habit of asking people why they have or do not have guns. They say:

- "I have many guns, each with a different purpose. Some are family heirlooms; some are for sport."
- "I don't have one right now, but I plan on purchasing one soon, to be quite honest. I raise my own animals and I think a pistol would be a more humane way to put them down."
- "I have four. It's a very expensive habit."
- "I don't. But I'm becoming more comfortable with the idea of getting one for protection, especially because I am a doomsayer and I think the end is coming soon (laughter)."
- "I have one, but it stays in my panty drawer, only to come out when I want to pretend I'm in *Call of Duty* and clear the rooms in my house."

Guns are not toys. Neither are knives, grenades, pepper spray, fire poker, or cars. However, look no further than the children's section at any horrible consumer cesspool and you will find that toys are guns. Toys are cars. Toys are knives.

Some believe that anything can be used as a weapon. I guess it follows that others believe anything can be used as a toy.

Toy selections are limited, terrible, and crafted toward outdated gender stereotypes. For a young girl this is dangerous because dolls and makeup

will give her an unhealthy focus on her appearance. There is more danger with "boy" toys, although their impact is possibly less noticeable. They foster the normalcy of violence that will be reinforced over and over through entertainment for the rest of their lives.

Where does the "fun" come in? I'm unsure that killing for pretend should fall under the same classification as fun. What becomes of fun when our understanding of the word is altered or skewed?

Killer, Devil Dog, fucker. These are all gender-neutral nouns commonly used to identify Marines. Sometimes I would get called a she-devil, which I found abstractly flattering. I was often asked by civilians throughout my enlistment if I could kill.

It is a stupid question. I am trained to kill. It is not my idea of fun.

I was raised to be angry. It took me years to find out how I could make this useful. I was an angry, confused child. Now I am an angry, fired-up woman with high goals and strong opinions. I'll admit, I used to be more vengeful. When my stepbrother got in a car accident, I wished death upon him every day he was comatose. This anger is standard for many children who go off to the military.

I'll never forget a night overseas when some of us got excessively drunk at a liberty port and shared some of the most intimate details of our childhoods.

We were all fucked. Fucked up. We wanted to kill our stepdads. We wanted to save our mothers from their aggressors and themselves. We loved and craved movies like *300*. We turned to sex, drugs, and alcohol. We thought too much about our own deaths.

We had to find some way to crawl out from our environments, even if death was a possible price. We had to get better. Becoming a trained killer—what a beautiful escape.

I don't know how to feel. I believe humans are inherently good but collectively contribute to bad problems far beyond gendered toy-manufacturing. Technology can be used as a weapon for infiltration, propaganda, and microaggressions, and as a cause toward outward violence. In the wake of the Stoneman Douglas shooting, similar Russian bots that were used to influence our presidential elections fled to the internet, posting images on social media with the tag #guncontrol.

When we start thinking of weapons as catalysts of violence, we can understand that while "people kill people," we should not underestimate the power of the things we contrive. Our inventions are evolving and influencing society faster than we have time to process the change. My head spins around the notion that it's not us, but our creations which inflict the most damage.

March fifteenth, 2019, New Zealand: fifty killed, fifty more wounded. I'm driving to class shaking as I hear NPR cover the story. The next story is another disaster, this one natural. Thousands of people are dead along the horn of Africa after a series of tornadoes tore through the region. I start to think about casualties, possibly the unavoidability of disaster and the chaos it leaves. I think about the rise in tragedies in general that kill many people, and cry from this overwhelming connection to those I've never met. Somehow, I know, we are intertwined and our beliefs, our actions, our purchases—all matter and have an effect. I wonder, how late are we to contemplate these things?

*I think it's time we stop—children, what's that sound?
Everybody look what's goin' down.*

•

Out to See
Photography by Matt Biggs





Memories from Waves
Art by Kasey Lewis

About This Fall

Nonfiction by Nikki Kroushl

I came back to the place I call home in the downpour heat of August. I arrived in town dripping in Metropolitan Transit Authority humidity. June and July had smashed my porcelain image of the future: the skyscrapers, the pumps, the smell of sex and power. I was more than ready for a homecoming.

&

I have trouble remembering, now, whether I woke up to see the sunrise before or after that summer. Whether I am imagining all these sunrises. I do remember the night on the beach, after the summer and after New York and after the hurricane, the stars littering the sky. You can't step in the same river twice—you can't sit on the same beach and you can't lie under the same stars.

You can't even live in the same home one millisecond moment to the next.

&

When I was sixteen, I spent a week at summer camp in Wilmington. I wrote about standing knee-deep in the Atlantic. I wrote with all the grace and understated flavor of molasses. But I sensed the revolutionary power that a home you get to choose has on your heart, your head, the taste of the day when you wake up in the morning.

&

I leaned my mattress against the window. I moved my bookshelf into the bathroom. I pulled things off my walls: the bulletin board full of love notes. The watercolor from a little village on the edge of the Rhine.

&

On this beach, I saw an ocean sunrise for the first time. On this beach, I found God in the quiet. On this beach, I was supposed to go skinny-dipping. Each act equal parts beauty, fear, sacrifice, vulnerable stripping of inside to out.

&

Memorial Bridge: a big yawning arch above the Cape Fear River. I had driven over this behemoth dozens of times, every journey a furtive attempt to balance looking at the road and staring across the glittering expanse of water, the riverwalk, the burnt reds and pastels of riverfront buildings.

At the peak of the arch, I looked away from the water and bit my lip, holding back a burst of fear.

&

A week before I skipped town, I sat sobbing in the office of Sister Rosemary McNamara. She told me: “The Holy Spirit is guiding us. She is.”

&

A day before I skipped town, I helped my supervisor wrap trash bags around all the computers and electronics in the building.

“If water gets in here, I doubt that it will help much,” she admitted. “But we have to say we tried.”

&

Pre-exodus, I went to drink, laugh, make plans with the neighbors. It was the kind of evening where intimacy creeps in with the slow prowling warmth of a light buzz. Learning how to tiptoe across the threshold from stranger to sibling—or sometimes, if we were really drunk, to tumble face-first across that boundary.

&

On the bridge I whispered: Please, God, please save this town. It was the first time I’d found it in myself to pray—really, honestly pray—in weeks. I could handle the threat of losing my religion, or I could handle the threat of losing the first home I chose—but I could not stomach both.

&

We thought we’d greet contractors from our bedroom thresholds with coffee mugs in hand as they shoveled collapsed plaster out of our kitchen. Less than a month before, I had finally changed my address and voter registration. Within a week, we were deemed homeless.

&

Just across the South Carolina border, I pulled over in an oxbow of gravel. I couldn’t breathe. Or rather, I couldn’t stop breathing, dragging coarse air across the sinewy bow of my vocal cords and lungs and cilia until the whole inside of my throat was raw.

&

Mostly what shocked me was the anger. Seething and seeping, sourceless and insidious. And the fear that this is what God does to you when you abandon him.

&

I should have documented my heart as it palpitated. By the time I returned to finish this draft, I forgot that moment where I paused on the crest of Memorial Bridge and choked back a gasp. I can name it now: the clairvoyance of loss.

&

I would like to tell you that I think I was lonely. I think I was looking for something, the way we all are when fall dissolves into dripping sleet. Someone to curl up with. I lived in a house, but I still didn’t have a home. I wanted a home: I wanted it in people, not places. I wanted it in an orgasm. I wanted it in a God I couldn’t find.

&

The new house was old and temporary. The house creaked. The house was full of flat, hard twin beds. The house had toilets that acted up. The house had a back porch, too, and that was beautiful. But mostly all of it was a reminder of what wasn’t ours, the idea that we lived on borrowed space, floorboards, time.

&

I haven’t made it to the homecoming part. I feel still-caught in the wilds of the wrecking.

•

Barely Standing

-Aftermath of Hurrican Florence on N. Topsail Beach

Photography by Matt Biggs





Frozen Fire

Fiction by Ciera Lloyd

My lips are blue, but I can't stop bringing the iced water to them. Snow falls around me, gathering in the pots of the dead plants I can't be bothered to water. The T-shirt around me does nothing to protect me from the cold.

I still don't leave my apartment balcony, even as I feel the ice forming on my eyelashes.

It wasn't supposed to be there. Routine day, they had told us. We'd get in, get out. It was just a precaution, they had reassured us. This is what I tell my therapist when she asks how I feel about it, when she asks me why I can't accept what happened. Because it wasn't supposed to happen, is what I say. They taught us how to deal with a fire that had already been lit. How to put it out. How to save everyone there.

They didn't teach us what to do if the fire hadn't started. They didn't teach us what to do if we started it—didn't tell us how to avoid a home-made bomb that nobody was expecting.

My brain tried to block out most of it, my therapist tells me. That's why I can't remember the actual bomb or the rest of the day.

But I can remember the team: their frantic faces covered in soot and dirt; the building collapsing around us; the screams of the people we were there to save. We ended up being the ones to hurt them.

I ended up being the one to hurt them.

I was the one who set off the bomb.

"You stay with us, Riley," Hayes had said to me, pressing her jacket against my burned body, trying to shield it. "You don't get to leave us."

"I don't—don't," I had coughed, "think I have much of a choice."

"That's an order from your chief."

Her eyes locked into mine. Her voice was steady. The arms holding her jacket to me were shaking,

covered in blood. The Station 3 insignia was lost against the destruction of the coat. I couldn't hear the rest of the words she was yelling. Her mouth was open wide, and I could feel her spit fall onto my face. Next to me, Warren squeezed my hand tighter than a tourniquet. I counted the veins in his arm to keep my thoughts away from the pain.

My therapist calls it PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder. She calls it this when I tell her I can't focus on anything else: when I'm making something in the microwave and the heat takes me back to that day; when my husband comes home from work in his fire department jacket and I see Hayes' bloody arm.

I told her when I have the episodes it feels like I'm burning from the inside out. She told me to drink a glass of cold water. To convince myself I wasn't there. To cool myself down. I want to call her now and tell her the trick didn't work. Tell her that the \$100 she charges for weekly appointments did nothing for me. Not when it mattered.

Because the smoke alarm didn't detect the fire in the oven. Didn't notice when something fell off the tray and onto the bottom. When it caught fire.

And then I was back there. Watching the horror on Warren's and Hayes' faces. Watching Stuart try to put out the flames on my body. The scene just replays in my head.

No matter how many breathing exercises I did—in, out, in, out—no matter what kind of mantra I told myself, I couldn't get back to the apartment. I felt trapped inside the four walls. Like every breath I took was taking all the air out of me instead.

I took a sip of water. The way my therapist suggested. Drink for two seconds, exhale for another two. Repeat until I'm calm, she told me.

I went through three glasses of water.

I stumbled through the apartment, around my burning legs, my burning body, until I got to the patio door. Anything to get out of there. But even when I got outside, I could still feel the heat of the bomb, still hear the cries of the people in the building, still feel Warren's fingernails digging into my arm.

Nothing, though, could have prepared me for the flames in my legs. The heat rising from the tips of my toes to the tops of my thighs. Engulfing every last nerve, hair, muscle, tissue, and bone. Even stepping onto the patio and embracing the snow falling around me couldn't get rid of the fire. Sitting down at the table, trying to convince myself that I wasn't there—that I was home—did nothing for me.

Sitting outside now, I can hear my baby's cries. I know that means she needs to eat; I can tell the difference between the attention and eating cries. I know I need to pump, but I can't leave the table.

I don't have any legs to carry me inside.

I lost them in a fire.

My prosthetics are two feet away from me, from when I took them off and slammed them into the glass door to get rid of the pain. The pain my therapist calls "phantom pain."

I'm stuck to the chair; it's so cold I can't even crawl inside.

So I drink my water, and hope that my husband gets home soon.

•



Dancer in the Desert
Photography by Will Fullerton



Olla

Fiction by Marina Zurita

I grew up in northern Connecticut with my mom, my two older brothers, and Matilda, an old widow who had been our tenant since I was a girl. My mom worked long hours and weekends as a nurse, so most of the time my brothers, Matilda, and I were left alone. She liked to talk, and since I listened to her, I was her favorite person in the house.

Matilda mostly talked about her family. She had been married for 40 years and had a daughter who had been born premature and died. She once told me about how terrifying she thought it must feel to be born. According to her, the womb was a soft, warm bathtub where we lived before being born. Each one of us had a personal bathtub. It was the only time in our lives where we could breathe underwater. There was nothing to see or smell, and our ears could only hear music. But, at some point, we had to leave. Once we were entirely expelled, something cold burned our skin and lungs, and our eyes were suddenly blinded by light.

Matilda always played with a handkerchief upon her lap and straightened it with her hands while telling a story. Her hands would iron the handkerchief non-stop. When she talked about her daughter, she had a soft quality in her hands and looked at the piece of fabric as if folding the first piece of clothing she had ever bought for her baby.

Listening to her stories was the guarantee that my brothers wouldn't come near me. I dreaded being alone with them. However, on Sundays, Matilda spent the day at mass and then the cemetery visiting her husband and daughter, and I was left alone to fend for myself.

I spent Sundays in my room, stimulating my brothers' creativity as to how to get me to open the door. Once, they tore all the pages out of my favorite book, then slipped them under my door.

That was the closest they ever got to almost getting me to come out. As I got older, I learned my own ways of revenge. I never told Mom or hit them back. My revenge was solely for myself.

Sometimes I would wake up early, run to a nearby pond, and collect tadpoles that would soon inhabit my brothers' shampoo container, and later their curls. Even though they weren't aware of my secret missions, looking at their faces and imagining tadpoles swimming in their hair gave me the satisfaction I needed.

I was the first one to leave the house.

I met Robert when I was eighteen, on my first day at work. I was standing in one of the many white hallways when he approached me.

"Are you the new nurse?"

He skipped introductions and told me there was something I had to see. Real men don't ask for permission, as he used to say. We took the elevator two floors up, and stood three feet away from each other without supervision. The elevator doors opened, and across from us was a big aquarium filled with newborns. Holding one of them was my mom, his favorite nurse.

We stood there, and I noticed a big plastic cocoon on the left, protecting a tiny little baby—the only one dressed in yellow. She had a cap on her head and was breathing through a tube. Later that day I asked my mom about the baby in the cocoon and she explained to me what yellow meant: premature, or as Matilda would say, "not ready yet."

The fact that I, the skinny, quiet, and shy kid was able to somehow attract a real man into my life made Mom proud. She would ask me to talk about him. For the next two years she came into my room every night and brushed my hair while I told her about how he made me feel, all the smart

things he said, and how in love he was with me.

Her questions did not stop after the wedding, but after our wedding night there was nothing else I felt like sharing. He laid me down in the most awkward way and I didn't know what to do first. He took off my clothes, and I took off his. I kept trying to remember what Matilda had told me the night before: "When it starts to hurt, remember to count until 10. It should be enough."

He said he was ready.

1: Everything he did to me hurt...

2: like rubber scrubbing an open wound...

3: but I didn't want him to know.

4: I was rigid...

5: and dry...

6: and just as I was about to cry...

7: he said, "I'm sorry."

I didn't understand. He was embarrassed, sweaty and couldn't look at me. I thought my frightened thoughts and muscles had talked to him. I didn't want to look at him. I didn't want to see the disappointment on his face, but he said, "I'm sorry. I guess I like you so much that I got too nervous, and..." It took me a glance of a second to realize what he meant.

I didn't know what to say to him, and I didn't want him to know how happy I was that he wouldn't hurt me again. So I kissed and hugged him until he was convinced that I was happy to be there.

The next day we tried again, and again the day after that, and again, and again...

The years passed, and sometimes I would make up excuses like feeling sick or pretending to be asleep. At some point, he lost his patience and decided to stop waiting. He said he did it for my own good, that it was something we had to get over with, and because he was a doctor, I believed him. He said that I had to be willing to relax, and every night he told me the next time would be better. Eventually, however, he stopped saying that. He never stopped looking at me, though. Somehow I agreed to be there night after night. However, on the day of his dad's retirement party everything changed for me.

I was supposed to be there at 3 p.m. with the cake, but I got there late. It wasn't until we got home that I realized how upset he was at me. It sounds silly, I'm

aware of it, but only something so stupid could make me understand how absurd our relationship was. I tried explaining to him that the bakery made a mistake with the frosting. He refused to believe me, and I didn't know what else to do, so I went to the kitchen to make us some tea.

He stayed in the bedroom, and for a couple of minutes it felt like I was alone in the house with the utensils in the washing machine. It was getting dark, and the orange streetlight was warming up the upper part of my body and the wall behind me. The air was light, and I thought maybe we were done for the night. But then he entered the kitchen and placed both his hands on the countertop in front of me.

I looked down and saw an ugly purple stain in the corner of my left eye. It hadn't always been a stain, I told myself. At first it had been a balloon, filled with air and places to go. Mom had been over for lunch, and I was helping her prepare a salad. She had asked me to mix beet cubes with onions, and as I had grabbed a handful of beets, one had fallen upon the counter. She had been fast in picking it up, but the wood was faster in sucking in all that red moisture, forming the extravagant air balloon. It was missing its basket, so I had painted it myself. Mom hadn't even seen it. After lunch, though, we cleaned up the kitchen, and she had scrubbed the countertop, turning my air balloon into an ugly stain.

"Turn around," he said.

There was barely any space between our bodies. I turned. He wouldn't look at me. He put his hands around my waist and moved them up my spine and around my neck. I tried to break away from him but couldn't. It got harder and harder to breathe. I grabbed his wrists and told him to stop. He looked at me, and little by little I felt the air in my lungs again. There were shadows around the room and light golden-brown spots popping out of his eyes. I don't remember what happened next. He must have carried me to bed.

I woke up exhausted. It was cold and too early to be awake. I lay on the right edge of the bed, and he in the middle facing the other way. I could see the right

side of his upper back and part of his left shoulder. I couldn't see his nape, but I knew it was there, holding his two chains, his head, his ego, and his curls. He was breathing easily but somehow sucking up all the air in the room. There wasn't any left; there was nothing left. I decided to go. I put on my shoes and started walking.

I stepped on cracks and ignored red lights, things I never did before. My thoughts were just a second behind my steps. No matter what, I could still walk and I could still breathe, and that was something. I was moving faster than everyone around me, and breathing frantically, trying to decrease pressure by taking as much air off my body as possible.

I felt my bones and muscles colliding with a stranger who was clearly not in a rush to get to work. I wasn't dead. I stopped and tried to figure out where I was.

I looked ahead and saw a bus almost smash a bird that was rushing across the street. A few feathers fell to the ground, but other than that it was fine. The bird carried on flying and the bus went on its way. Both had places to go. The bird didn't seem to be aware of what had almost just happened. Almost dead, yet still alive, pecking crumbs with its fragile, dirty beak.

Yesterday Robert had almost smashed my throat, because of white vanilla frosting and time. I stood there and tried to decide where I was going. The sun warmed the cement under my feet. Mom would probably be at work, but Matilda would be happy to see me. She would ask me what happened, and I would ask her to tell me a story, and I'd listen more attentively than ever.

•
Authors Note:

Vaginismus is a condition defined by involuntary muscle spasms triggered by any attempt of vaginal penetration. In North America, around 12-21% of women report having genito-pelvic pain but true prevalence is unknown due to restricted data. The underlying cause is usually a fear of penetration, which can be prompted by a history of sexual assault, endometriosis, vaginitis, etc. For more information, visit <https://vaginismus.com>

Black Sister Love
Art by Ajane' Williams



The Future in the Fire

Fiction by V. Nicole Dunn

My grandma and granny sit on either side of me; we face the burning fire in front of us. The smell of coal and ash coats my face and hair. I look between them both. My granny sits forward a little.

“I died in the nursing home, remember?” Granny says.

“Then why do I remember you living in the little house with the birds,” I ask, “instead of the nursing home?”

“Because that was a nicer way to remember me,” she says.

I look at my grandma. Her wrinkles glow in the firelight. She looks as she did when I was a child. Liver spots speckle her arms and hands, and there is one on her cheek. She looks like she used bronzer for blush. It is a healthy glow, compared to the later chalk dusting of chemo.

Granny places her hand on my arm, and I turn to look at her. She is thin, girlish even. Her eyelids are dusted a light lavender and her lips a soft pink. She looks as I remember seeing her last—lying young and beautiful in the satin bed of the coffin.

“But you look like you did after you died, Granny,” I say. “Grandma looks like she did when I was younger.”

“Because this is a nicer way to remember me,” she says.

I think back to my last memory of Granny. Alive.

I was five. We were in the nursing home and my mother picked me up out of my wheelchair so I could see better. Granny’s body seemed massive. The body in the bed expanded and melted into the mattress, and I couldn’t see where she began and ended. This heaving mass of flesh took labored breaths and her eyes were slits that stared at me. Someone—probably my aunt—had smeared red juicy lipstick on her pale face. To me, she barely looked human. Certainly unrecognizable.

“Give Granny a kiss,” my mother cooed.

I didn’t want to be rude, but I also didn’t want to. I squirmed.

“This is the last time you will get the chance,” my mother hissed in my ear.

I squeezed my eyes shut and my mother smooshed me against her. The juicy lips smiled, and a sigh of relief whistled through me. I was placed back into the wheelchair.

I look to Granny, and the same shock runs through me as it did at her funeral. She seemed so thin then. She seems so thin now. The firelight

cuts her cheekbones, and you can certainly see where her body ends.

“It is,” I say.

“I remember that moment,” Granny says. “I know it was hard, but thank you.”

I can’t respond. My back hunches further and I hide my face behind my mess of hair.

“So, how do you want to be remembered?” Grandma asks.

A log in the fire crackles as it sinks further into the flames.

•

Grange
Art by Zoey Lent





In Memory of
Riley Howell
&
Ellis “Reed” Parlier

UNCC,
we stand with you.



Contributors

Matt Biggs is a twenty-two-year-old senior physics student at UNCW. He found photography one-and-a-half years ago at the intersection of self-expression and quantifiable precision. Matt hopes to continue developing his photography skills while he prepares to hike the Appalachian Trail and eventually obtain a graduate degree in computer engineering.

Tiananmen Campbell is a recent graduate of ASU with a BA in studio art with a concentration in painting and drawing. Although she studied traditional art, she was a former graphic design student before she decided to change majors. Now she uses her knowledge in both design and art to create works that combine elements of both fields in hopes of better understanding what it means to be both a designer and an artist.

Natalia Conte was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and is greatly inspired by the strong women who raised her to be a proud feminist. Currently, she is pursuing her MFA in poetry at NCSU while working at a fun, eclectic coffee shop. Her writing has appeared in So to Speak Magazine, Atlas and Alice, and The Roanoke Review, among others.

Kristen Dorsey is an artist, dance teacher, and USMC veteran. Kristen is also a student at UNCW majoring in creative writing. Follow Kristen on Instagram at La_Loba_Arts and Facebook at La Loba, Art from Nature.

V. Nicole Dunn graduated May 2019 with a BFA in creative writing, a minor in psychology, and a certificate in publishing. When she's not writing, she's advocating for menstrual cups and experimenting with her vintage popcorn maker.

Will Fullerton is a student photographer and filmmaker at Wake Forest University looking to pursue a master's degree in film production after completing his undergraduate degrees in May. He is currently in his second year as Photo Editor for Wake Forest's yearbook publication, The Howler. Will also runs a small social media business, @travelfuller, doing work for clients such as MVMT and Parks Project, with some pieces appearing in

galleries in the U.S. and abroad. His goal as a filmmaker is to raise public awareness and encourage change, specifically in regard to international socioeconomic issues.

Austin Garner is a junior at UNCG who finds joy in trying new things and likes to challenge himself. Photography is one activity among many through which he's sought to better himself. One day he hopes to take all that he's learned into the realm of filmmaking, where he can live out his dream.

Paul Kurzeja is obtaining his MA in creative writing at UNCC. He is a winner of the UNCC James McGavran Award for Writing and the Elizabeth Simpson Smith Short Story Award. He was also a finalist for the Doris Betts Fiction Prize. Paul has most recently been published in Boston Accent Literary Magazine and Flash Fiction Magazine.

Nikki Kroushl (sometimes writing as Nicole Crucial) studied various dark arts (one of them creative writing) at UNCW. Much like a houseplant, she loves sunlight, the indoors, astrology poems, and when the cat sits next to her on the window sill. Her fabulist fiction, self-indulgent essays, and occasional rogue poem appear in Diabolical Plots, Zizzle Literary, Atlantis, Runestone Literary Journal, In the Beginning: Dark YA Retellings of Biblical Tales, and other places. More of her work can be found at nicolecrucial.com.

Zoey Lent is a seventeen-year-old rising senior attending East Bladen High School in Elizabethtown, NC. She discovered her love of art while taking her first art class under Mr. Ron Warren in the tenth grade. Since then, she has created many works of art using different mediums. She is planning on applying to attend UNCW after she graduates in 2020.

Kasey Lewis is a young, talented artist with a promising future. She graduated from CFCC with an associate's degree in art and full honors as a member of Phi Theta Kappa and as president of the CFCC visual arts club. She has been making art ever since she was young and continues to put her heart into everything she does to make her

work the best that it can be. She plans to continue her journey and training at the UNCSA school of filmmaking. There is nothing that can hold her back as she pursues her dreams.

Ciera Lloyd is a BFA candidate in creative writing at UNCW with a minor in English and a certificate in publishing. She's been reading since before she knew how to spell her own name, which turned into a love for writing. She still owns the Spider-Man notebook she wrote her first book in at seven (even though it's terrible and she wishes she didn't). She aims to write pieces that focus on humanity, particularly the gritty and often ugly part of it. After school, she plans on traveling the world and writing.

Eleanor Nesimoglu is a recent graduate of the creative writing program at UNCW. Before receiving her BFA and minor in English, she was raised in Wisconsin. She went on to serve in the Marine Corps and become a food enthusiast. After graduation, she plans to continue to travel and achieve higher goals and degrees.

Olivia Norman is a senior commercial photography major at ASU. She intends to pursue travel and lifestyle photography upon graduation in December.

Gianna Spitaliere is an undergraduate student at UNCW studying creative writing and receiving her certificate in publishing. Her work has been published on campus through the English department, and she worked with an internship where she collaborated in publishing an Icelandic travel guide. She mainly focuses on writing poetry and fiction, and she enjoys bringing the two together in her own abstract way.

Ajane' Williams is a twenty-year-old African American artist born in Fort Stewart, Georgia. She currently attends UNCC as a studio art major. Wil-

liams grew up as a military child living in a variety of environments such as Germany, Japan, Korea, Alaska, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina. Being exposed to a multitude of cultures influenced Williams to explore and express her own African American culture.

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

Marina Zurita is a Brazilian directing student at UNCSA's drama school. Her studies also include two years at Teatro Escola Célia Helena (Brazil, São Paulo), the intensive program at the Moscow Art Theatre, and the two-year conservatory program at the Lee Strasberg Theater & Film Institute. Her student directing credits include The individuality of Streetlamps, by Anna K. Gorisch, and Caleb and Rita, by Jessica Moss. She has received awards from StrasbergWORKS 2018 for her original full length play, Goosey, which was produced by the LS Institute in the Summer of 2018.

ATLANTIS

a creative magazine

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

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

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