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Introduction

When we think of magazines, either as readers or as creators (for those of us who are in the business of making them), we realize that so much of magazine making is about the packaging of stories into a specific physical form—that inextricable intertwining of the written word with the photography, the glossy layouts, and the covers that combines to present a particular kind of tactile storytelling experience.

Yet there's a reason that other, definitively not printed media characterize the work they do as “magazine”-like: the television “news magazine” programs that communicate the significance of their video feature packages by attaching that label or the digital long-form sites that articulate their value by describing them as “magazine quality.” So it would seem that the most distinguishing aspect of magazines isn't necessarily their printed form or even the inventive and wildly creative visual packaging those printed products take. What distinguishes magazines is the quality of the stories they present.

Magazine writing is beautifully crafted. Its storytelling and commentary are deep and immersive, built on both dogged reporting and the painstaking review and critique provided by an editorial process that prizes intellectual rigor and the opportunity to challenge assumptions. It emerges on the other side with a point of

view—one that doesn't require you necessarily to agree with the writer's every conclusion but that asks you to consider and form your own questions.

Take, for example, Ronan Farrow's "Abuses of Power," the culmination of a ten-month investigation into accounts of sexual assault and harassment by the disgraced Hollywood executive Harvey Weinstein—the investigation a product of years of reporting leads developed and followed up, until the moment that the story was possible to corroborate. Between that piece and the two follow-ups by Farrow, all part of this collection (not to mention the tremendous reporting also done by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey of the *New York Times* in their series of stories), the entertainment world began to reckon with a darkness that had stained the industry for decades. The outcome was the broader cultural conversation and movement that we now know as #MeToo. Such an achievement doesn't happen without the investment and the commitment of resources afforded by the supporting institution—in Farrow's case, *The New Yorker*.

Similarly, Nina Martin and Renee Montagne's deep dive into the dangers of maternal care in their *ProPublica*-NPR piece, "The Last Person You'd Expect to Die in Childbirth," required months of not just combing through medical studies and analyses but also identifying and reporting on the experiences of some 450 women who, since 2011, had died during or soon after childbirth. "The death of a new mother is not like any other sudden death," Martin writes. "It blasts a hole in the universe." And it is not an overstatement to say that this piece blasted a hole in the understanding many Americans—particularly women and mothers, both current and expecting—had of the care they might expect or may already have received during the delivery of their own children.

And these are just two of the incredible stories you will read in this anthology.

The subjects of this year's stories are, more often than not, dark or challenging. These are challenging and polarized times, after all. But part of their gift is that even as the world mostly speeds past then, disappears with an ephemeral scroll or swipe, even as we too often over-rely on the minute-by-minute hot take to parse current events, these pieces ask us to press pause and think, hard, about why the world we live in is the way it is. And what we might do to participate differently.

That's why I love this collection that you now hold in your hand, this annual effort to boil magazine storytelling down to just the writing—that sparest and, ultimately, most essential aspect. Each piece affords us the same precious gift that was bestowed upon the reporters and writers who created them: the gift of time.

Time to consider. Time to challenge and be challenged. Time to ask questions, and then more questions, and then more questions still. Time to think.

From all of us who took the time to create for you, please read and enjoy every last word.