

LOCH NORSE MAGAZINE  
ISSUE FIVE 2016

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

When I sat down to look through all of the pieces and find a common theme amongst them, I came up blank. Throughout all of the marvelous works of art we received for this issue, a common theme didn't jump out at me. A feeling did, however. Reading these pieces of fiction, of creative nonfiction, of poetry, and looking at these pieces of art brought upon a very strong emotion that I can only identify as longing.

Longing for companionship; longing for help; longing for simplicity; longing for self. In some cases, the emotion is subtle, barely there unless you look close enough; in other cases, the emotion is glaringly obvious, screaming in your face.

While last year's issue had a strong sense of community, I feel that this issue of *Loah Norse Magazine* is rich with a desire to find something purposeful within that community; be it water in the middle of a drought, a friendship that ended badly, or a tasty donut. If it's one thing I've learned this year, as editor in chief and as an English student at NKU, it's that the creative writing community on campus will happily assist you in finding the purpose you long for.

I've ended my time at NKU immensely proud of *Loah Norse Magazine*. The people that make this magazine what it is have given me a purpose and I'm excited to see what road they venture down in the years to come.

So, without much further ado, it's with pride that I present to you *Loah Norse Magazine Issue Five*; may it fill you with a sense of longing for an adventure greater than you've yet had.

Carlin Fletcher  
Editor-in-Chief

Nick Snider  
*How to Make Algae Paper*

*Inspired By: Amber Stucke's "Book of Green Algae: Daytime" 101 Stacked Sheets of Paper Made out of Green Algae on White Wall Shelf*

1. To make algae paper you will need to visit your grandpa's now unkempt pond. Skim a thin layer from the water's surface, feel it cling to you like a bad dream, and press it between your palms. Let beads of water roll down your naked wrists and arms. In them, like crystal balls, you will see images of childhood games of backyard kickball. Watch as the kick goes astray and the ball hits the pond with a splash and the copper-orange koi flee to the bottom. You might also see small hands cupped together as flakes of fish food are poured into them, and then watch the koi return to the surface, mouths gaping. When all of the water has run out, your paper is ready to be used.
2. The second sheet you will scrape off of the fallen tree in the woods behind your house. You will wonder if the bark, now gray, knows that it was once part of a whole, and the jagged trunk behind you does not look lonely because it still stands beside its neighbors. As the green matter lifts away like a veil, there will be a rustle in the undergrowth, a squirrel. He does not seem to be afraid of you, but rather looks at you with black eyes, head cocked. You wonder if, to him, you are like the log because you once laid on your back in the snow-covered yard for over an hour. The world seemed so empty until your mom called you back inside, and you remembered that you too are part of a greater whole.

Kyndra Howard  
*Introduction to Philosophy*

My philosophy professor drew a circle within a square upon the whiteboard then began to lecture to the class on the absence of knowledge.

As his lecture picked up and passion moved his body he threw his arms back and slammed his finger in the middle of the circle that was within the square that was labeled "self."

When he removed his finger a little bit of "self" was gone, and I spent the rest of class wondering where it went.

## MID Bell

*be still, silent*

carry  
foremothers,  
forefathers,  
with bent toes,  
stretch out  
in morning Sun.  
carry tragedy  
of burdened widows  
on trunk of legs,  
sprawl  
into midsummer dreariness.  
witness  
rain fall  
upon a stitch of grass.  
carry snarled  
pastures of breath,  
crack a sigh.  
spread out  
among the branches.  
fingers linger,  
where Love tingles,  
trickle a song  
of movement.  
still  
silent  
in the moment  
of everlasting  
sovereignty.

## Ernest Alexander

*Coffee Table*

Nothing left on, nothing running.  
The empty apartment didn't move.  
The framed pictures on the wall told still, two dimensional stories with  
painted on expressions overacting to convey the mood being captured. The  
pictures were voided checks in the lives of those inhabiting them. They  
were set on the wall to do nothing more than gather dust and fade; just as  
all memories often do. On the adjacent wall stood a large false fireplace  
made of beautiful mahogany wood. The mantel above the fireplace was  
littered with "Get well soon" cards of every color and size. Though the  
thought was there, these cards mimicked the same flat emotions of the  
people in the pictures. The names signed on the insides were no more than  
scribbles on a page, their meaning more of a consolation prize than  
anything else.  
Yet, at the center of this space was the true evidence of life. Not the  
pictures in there dusty crooked frames and smudged glass, or the cards on  
the mantel showing store bought emotions but there, in the center of the  
room, a coffee table stood.  
This table stood proud and it was clear it had had a long life.  
Rightfully named, the table was stained with coffee rings from mugs  
that sat on it during warm summer mornings passed watching television  
and cold winter nights snuggling to stay warm.  
Dried paint chips of every color dotted its surface from her many  
afternoons of passionately creating with gentle brush strokes as he watched  
and strummed his guitar. There were four permanent dips in the wood  
from propping their feet up to relax. A deep knick occurred from a run in  
with a doorframe when her side was a bit too heavy on moving day.  
A small crack in the center of the surface could be seen from that day  
when the world was unfair and the news was just too much to bear. On the  
lower left corner of the table stood a stack of books; fairytales he would  
read her on her worst of days. The days she could do nothing more than lay  
on the couch and laugh at his silly voices. A stack of medical bills grew on  
the lower right corner of the table serving as a constant reminder of hope  
both simultaneously increasing and decreasing. This beautiful table told  
their love story. Beauty found in the flaws and the memories from which  
cracks came. Through all the trials, this table still stood.  
And in a moment, the apartment awoke. The lock turned and he  
entered, dripping from the rain outside. The smell the funeral flowers he  
carried sickened him. He placed these traditional grievous gifts on the coffee

table. It creaked from the additional weight. He closed and locked the door, taking a moment to gather himself. The man still hadn't adjusted to the silence. He removed his overcoat, now heavy and drenched with rain. A drop fell from his face. He folded his coat aggressively and threw it down onto the coffee table. As it hit, a loud crack let out from the previously damaged leg. As he collapsed on the couch in despair, the table fell to the ground. Irreversibly broken.

Nic Vitale

### *A Solace in Entropy*

I can't help but focus on the smell of stale cigarettes and clean cotton as I slouch in the driver's seat of my 2006 Honda Civic. The dusk has taken her toll on this paved parking lot, and she's making her way to my heart. The warm wind blows my hair in every direction as I swing the car door open. The angst-y sound of Frank Turner blasts through the speakers until I turn the key and pull it out. The lack of noise leaves my heart with hints of depression. It has been a year since I have visited my concrete Bodhi Tree, but this Buddha is not looking for enlightenment.

My mind visualizes the ten paces from the parking space farthest from the three story building that houses college students, yet only two people in the world know about it. As I hug the rightmost curb, I count the steps from ten to one in my head, because the grass has grown to camouflage the path's entrance. When I arrive at the carefully counted destination I push through the overgrown plants like Kali, the Hindu goddess of time and destruction. The path remains intact though covered with large rocks and soaking soil. I look up from the ground toward my left and catch a glimpse at the most beautiful sight that my eyes have ever gazed upon.

A drain pipe, no different than any other, stands adjacent to a small wooded area and the daydreams of my past. The path used to meet the base of the exit spout but Mother Nature has weathered it away in an attempt to keep me from remembering. Her efforts are futile as my feet hurdle the guard rail and meet the flat, concrete base that I had grown to call home. Immediately, I recognize that the rocks that once graciously let us use them as a footrest had been washed all the way to the bottom of the hill. This place is much more dangerous than it used to be.

I fall backwards into a sitting position with my back straight and my legs dangling over the edge. Suddenly it strikes me how beautiful the weather is and how out of place it seems in the middle of winter. The scent of freshly cut grass and dead trees excite my limbic region blessing me with a memory of the only other person that's been here - Ean Daly, my cellmate when we lived in that three story building that housed college students. We spent most of the day escaping our prison to sit here, contemplating the future.

The weathered path, rocks, and entrance remind me of the sunny day that Ean and I spent smoking cigarettes and discussing entropy. He learned the word in his Astronomy class and seemed rather troubled by it.

"Well, if it bothers you so much, tell me what it means," I spoke.

Scrambling for a fly piece of notebook paper, Ean said, "Hold on... Here it is. Entropy means the gradual decline into disorder."

"Expound," I said curiously.

"Basically, things do not last forever," Ean said sadly. "Everyone you love is going to die, I am going to move back home after this semester, and, eventually, the entire universe is going to be absolutely nothing, just like it was before we got here."

"Oh. Here." I handed him a cancer stick labeled Turkish Royal and a lighter. "Might as well destroy our lungs, too." We both laughed and enjoyed conversations about Eastern philosophy as the cherry from our cigarettes burned slowly. The wind was still, but the sun was beating down on us with a hopeful intent.

The desire for a smoke pulls my head out of the flashback and pushes my hand into my left jacket pocket. I clench on to a rectangular prism and pull it into my range of sight. The box reads L&M Turkish, and I think about how even the little things have decayed. "Here's to you." The spark catches the fumes of the butane and creates a small, one inch fire at the tip of my lighter. I hold it up to the end of the tobacco tube in my mouth and inhale to slightly char the tip.

My mind scrambles to find a word to describe this beautifully warm weather in the middle of winter, this cigarette pressed between my lips, and this drain pipe that housed so many necessary conversations. Love is too mushy. Beauty is an ugly lie. Wonder implies that it's new. Solace... Yes, solace.

Solace, hope in the midst of despair, seems to be the only word that could describe the red clouds 30,000 feet above my head, the nicotine that relieves me of stress, and this place that reminds me of the way things used to be. I feel a sense of hope rush through my body like the cold chills I get when I listen to Frank Turner on a bad day. Solace is the only word I can use to describe my life at this current moment.

I scrape the finished cigarette out on the concrete to the right of where my feet are dangling and flick it a few feet forward onto the receded rocks. Maybe Ean was right: maybe everything is dying. Maybe in the end no one will remember me or anything I wrote while I was alive, but that does not make it pointless. Entropy is not an excuse for me to sit around skipping class while I cry into a bottle of cheap vodka.

A smile forms on my face when I realize that if things never end, then we would have no reason to cherish them. I wobble out of balance when I stretch my leg muscles to rise from a seated position, but the guard rail is there to stable my equilibrium. With both hands placed firmly on the guard rail, I lift myself over it and back onto the muddy path. Determined to

change the way I see life, I walk with confidence up the path, over the grass, and toward my car. This time things will be different.

I pull my car door open slightly, but the wind decides to forcefully swing it the rest of the way. I sit comfortably in my driver's seat, pull the door intensely toward me, insert my key in the ignition, and turn it to hear the sound of the engine. When my car awakens from its short nap, I notice that my phone is still plugged in to the radio. I twist the volume dial curiously - wondering what song was playing. A simple tune by Frank Turner titled Love, Ire and Song? blasted through the speakers surrounding me. The guitar strummed my emotions, the bass drum kicked my heart, and the lyrics sang, "If we're stuck on this ship and it's sinking, then we might as well have a parade."

Kirsten Hurst  
*Thirteen Lessons Not Yet Learned*

One.  
Your therapist is not mad at you.  
You have her number.

Two.  
When your father says not to buy the sweater with a picture of a  
utens on it,  
prepare for a lighter wallet.

Three.  
There is no shame in body love.  
Your body is indeed a fucking temple,  
and you will no longer skip services.  
Prominent ribs  
are not brownie points  
for missed breakfasts.  
Do not hide those stretch marks-  
they are reminders  
of how far your skin must reach  
so it can properly hold you.

Four.  
Drink more water.

Five.  
When a boy jeans so close you can smell his privilege  
tell him you are nobody's "good girl".  
You are venom tongue held too loose-  
vintage self-leathering tucked into shirt pockets.  
He is not good enough  
to accept hand-me-downs.

Six.  
Text your mother back.

Seven.  
When it's over,  
he will tell you he was drunk.

12

People say things they do not mean every day  
and you  
had just wanted to play make believe.

Eight.  
If you try hard enough,  
you can pretend the hurt is fake, too.

Eight.  
Remember that you were meant to fill rooms-  
not just the space between ring and finger.

Eight.  
When no one wants to love you,  
*you* have to love you.

Nine.  
Text your father back.

Ten.  
Always use your turn signal.

Eleven.  
There is nothing beautiful about depression  
but living through it.  
When friends show you bone wrists  
covered in knife-drawn constellations,  
do not look for yourself in them.

Twelve.  
Stop mistaking your steering wheel for an exit sign.  
Your lungs- party balloons.  
Do not go home yet.  
Remember body love.  
Remember stretch marks.

Thirteen.  
Remember to text your grandma back.

13

Chad Dunbar  
*Hot Nights*

hot nights  
and cotton fields...  
we work in the moonlight  
picking our quota with bent backs  
from midnight to sunrise  
while crickets chirp  
the blues

Kristen Petronio  
*Getting Rid of the Poison*

She lives in a masquerade.  
Once a loyal hound, now a snake.  
Her icy body constricts friends,  
deceives men,  
and shoots venom into their lives.  
She slithers, feeding on love,  
never satisfied.  
She hisses lies  
until someone throws a rock,  
and her glass case is smashed.  
I refuse to tiptoe  
around the shards of her shattered life.  
I walk straight through.



Ryan Johnson  
*The Glass Eye*

“What’s wrong with your eye?” Casey asked.

When Casey was six years old, he noticed something different about his grandpa’s left eye. It rolled in the socket rather than move effortlessly like Casey’s own eyes.

Casey and his mother were in Grandpa’s kitchen. His own father had abandoned the two of them when he was only two and Casey’s grandfather was the closest man he had as a father figure.

His mother turned sharply and said, “Casey!”

“It’s all right,” Grandpa retorted, slurping his coffee at the kitchen table.

“You’re just curious, aren’t you?”

Casey nodded.

“Well, you see,” Grandpa said, “I lost my real eye in Vietnam.”

This confused Casey. Grandpa had both of his eyes still. Yet one was just lazy and swayed a little from time to time.

Grandpa sensed his confusion and placed his index finger and thumb around his strange eye. “Let me show you.”

“Dad, it might scare him.”

“He’s fine knowing. It’s not a big deal anyway. I don’t mind.” He squeezed the top and bottom of his eye. Casey opened up his mouth to stop his grandfather.

*Please don’t take out your eye! I was only kidding! Don’t hurt your eye just to show me!*

But stopped as Grandpa easily popped it out of its socket. The empty socket shriveled a little as Casey covered his face with his hands. Grandpa held the eye between his fingers and set it on the table. It made a small *clank* when he set it down.

“This,” he continued, “is a glass eye. Some people who lose their eye will get one of these so that they don’t have an empty socket. It’s makes them look better.” He winked with his good eye at Casey. “Do you want to hold it?”

Casey tentatively stuck out his hand. He didn’t want to hold it, but he didn’t want to be rude either.

Grandpa placed the eye in Casey’s palm. It felt solid, sort of like a marble, as Casey squeezed it. It had a slight gooey coating around it that made it slip across his fingers. He set it back on the table.

“Cool, huh?” Grandpa asked. Casey couldn’t help but to look at the empty socket.

“Yeah,” he said nervously, “really cool.”

After Grandpa rinsed it off and put it back in, Casey felt better. Looking at the rolling eye was better than looking at the empty hole.

“I call it my lookin’ eye.”

Casey gave him a confused look. Usually Grandpa laughed at these faces, but he didn’t then. Casey’s mom was standing at the sink, watching them. He leaned in close to Casey’s ear.

“I can see things, y’know. Sees other things.”

A few weeks later, Casey went back to Grandpa’s house while his mom grocery shopped.

Grandpa relaxed in his old easy chair with the newspaper in his hands. His good eye rabidly scanned the pages, but the glass eye lolled in its socket.

Casey lay on his belly, arms propped up, watching the TV. The cartoon rolled on, enriching his brain with senseless (but bloodless and full of humor, so the grown ups thought it was okay) violence.

He heard his grandpa utter a soft groan.

Casey turned to see Grandpa sitting there, the paper now in his lap, moaning. His head was rigid and body stiff. A tiny sliver of drool formed under his lip. Casey thought Grandpa was asleep, but then he saw it. The right eye was closed, but the left was wide open. It stared right at him.

Casey stood up immediately. He opened his mouth to scream for his mother, but remembered she was shopping. Instead, he gathered his courage and walked towards the staring eye. He felt something twirl around in his stomach. His bladder almost loosened but he willed it to stop.

He was within touching distance of Grandpa. Casey slowly reached out with the intention of shaking him awake (please, please wake up), but stopped just above Grandpa’s arm.

What if something was wrong with him? What if he didn’t wake up?

*What if the eye moved and looked at me?*

He let his hand fall and shook Grandpa’s arm.

“Grandpa. Grandpa, wake up. Please.”

Still Grandpa moaned and the eye stared.

“Grandpa. Grandpa!”

Grandpa’s other eye opened. He stopped moaning and grabbed Casey’s wrist. The good eye stared at Casey’s own eyes.

“She was here. She was here. Right over there. Saw her. I saw her.

Josephine. I saw her. Over there.”

Then Grandpa let go and fell back in his chair. He blinked his eyes a few times and let out a series of short, deep breaths.

He studied Casey’s plaster face.

“Casey, are you feeling okay?” Grandpa asked, leaning toward him.

At first, Casey backed away but then embraced Grandpa, crying.

His mother came an hour later to pick him up. “C’mon, Case. Mom’s got milk that’s going to spoil if we don’t get home. Say bye to Grandpa.”

He hugged Grandpa again. Grandpa kissed him on the forehead and said,

“Get on out of here.” He smiled at Casey and winked with his good eye.

The ride home goes on for ages. Casey sat in the back seat with his head against the window. His mother looked at him in the rearview mirror and said, "What's up, Casey?"

Casey didn't feel like talking. He considered not answering her, but he knew that wasn't a very nice thing to do. "I just don't feel very good." He wasn't lying. He felt like a snake had crawled around his stomach and tied itself up. "I just want to be home."

She studied him closely. "Is it your stomach?"

He wondered how she knew. He admired how his mother always knew such things. It was as if she had some sort of power, like those mindreading superheroes in his comic books.

"Yeah. It just hurts a little."

She was still watching him, turning her eyes back to the road every couple seconds.

"You eat too much at Grandpa's?"

"No. It just hurts."

"Well," she said, "we're almost home."

For the next few minutes they rode in silence. Periodically, Casey would look up and see his mother watching him. He felt embarrassed. He knew he must have said or done something wrong and thought to ask her if he was in trouble, but thought better of it.

When they pulled into their garage, Casey's mother shut the car off and turned to face him.

"Did Grandpa scare you?"

*How does she know?*

Casey wanted to say yes, but instead resorted to what most kids his age resort to when they really don't know what to say.

He cried.

"What's wrong with Grandpa?" He said through a face full of tears.

His mom took him out of his booster seat and carried him inside. She sat down on the couch with him in her lap and rubbed his head.

"It's okay," she said, "Grandpa's okay."

Casey sniffled and wiped his eyes. "He scared me, Mom. Something was wrong with him."

"Oh, hon," she said. "Sometimes Grandpa has these—well, uh—episodes. Lots of old people have those."

The blurriness from his tears was going away and he looked up into his mother's smiling face. He tried his best to smile back.

"Grandpa's not sick?"

"No, baby," she said, stroking his hair. He loved when she did that.

"Sometimes Grandpa thinks about the war and it makes him sad. Sometimes it confuses him."

"Did something bad happen to Grandpa?"

"Well," she started, "war happened, honey. A lot of times people who go to war have a rough time when they get back home. For some people the war has a really bad effect on them. Then those people come home and sometimes remember the bad times at war. They can get sad or confused or scared."

"Grandpa was remembering the war? Why does it make him scared, Mom? He looked so afraid. It made me scared."

She hugged him tight. "You don't ever have to be scared. You just have to remember that sometimes that will happen when you are with Grandpa."

"So Grandpa's okay, right?"

"Right."

He felt a little better about it. Sometimes Casey got scared when he thought about the monsters from his comic books or the scary movies he sometimes sneaked to watch.

But then Casey remembered the glass eye. He remembered how it had *stared*.

"Mom?"

"Yeah, Sweetie?"

"Who's Josephine?"

His mom's face paled. She narrowed her eyebrows at him, and he realized he had asked the wrong question. Before he could apologize, she softened her gaze and sighed.

"She was your Grandpa's friend in the war."

Casey waited for a few seconds before he decided that it was safe to ask another question.

"Was she Grandma's friend, too?"

His Grandma had died shortly before his sixth birthday. It was breast cancer and they had caught it too late. Casey hardly remembered her.

His mom sighed again and attempted a smile. "No. She only knew Grandpa. She helped him get through the war."

"Did she help Grandpa find a new eye?"

"I don't think so, honey."

"Where is she now?"

"She died. In the war."

"Oh." Casey felt bad about asking. He thought it might have offended his mom for asking if the woman was still alive. But his mother still wore a smile. "C'mon," she said, "let's go make dinner."

Through the years, Casey grew accustomed to the eye. But he never fully quite got used to it. Every once and a while he would take a look at Grandpa, and Grandpa would look at him, and his eye would meet with both of Casey's. His good eye would look directly at him and the other often looked somewhere else. As if it saw something different.

Sometimes Casey would think about the eye, wondering what that eye saw. He still wasn't sure about what Grandpa had meant, *Sees other things*. But he

remembered exactly had been said as if it were yesterday. The way Grandpa said it, it was impossible to forget.

For the next seven years, Grandpa had his episodes. They happened every so often, and every time Casey did his best to look away. He would hear Grandpa utter different names, ones Casey didn't recognize. There was a Joey, a Henry, a Portland. There were a few times his mother had been in the room with them both. On those occasions, she came to Casey's side and whispered, as if it might disturb Grandpa otherwise, "He's remembering the people he went to Vietnam with. The ones who died."

Casey understood, but still wouldn't watch. He couldn't bear to see the glass eye.

Casey never questioned the episodes Grandpa had. He knew they were normal and they would probably always happen. His mother even took him to a nursing home when he was younger to reassure him that other people have episodes too.

Yet, he still cringed whenever he saw Grandpa having one. Deep inside, he knew something was different about Grandpa. No one else had a glass eye that stared at him during those episodes. Casey's mom explained that many people had what she called "PTSD," but he was smart enough to know that Grandpa's behavior was *different*.

Grandpa had a major stroke when Casey was thirteen. He fell into a coma soon after being hospitalized. His mother had a fit, as did his aunt. When asked if Grandpa would make it out of his coma, the doctors' expressions were grim.

"Our prognosis is poor at this point but that doesn't mean there isn't a chance of him waking up. However, if he were to awaken from his coma, the prognosis for his recovery would most likely be just as poor. I suggest arranging plans with the family. I'm terribly sorry."

The doctor told them this with a saddened, genuine expression but Casey knew they didn't care. Grandpa was just another patient. Just another body to dispose of once he—*if* he—died.

Grandpa was in the coma for three months. He spent his last days in a hospital a few miles from where Casey and his mother lived. The two of them saw Grandpa every day, always hopeful but never eager. The doctors were quite adamant about his spending the rest of his days, however many there were, as a mindless vegetable. They never said it that way, but Casey and his mother knew that's what he was.

Casey remembered those visits vividly. Each visit consisted of the same routine. He and his mother would walk into Grandpa's room, say hello, watch for a few minutes, hoping for some kind of movement, and then ultimately leave. They were disappointed each time. His mom would cry, but there was something inside him, some guilty conscience, that felt relief. He was afraid that if Grandpa woke up, the glass eye would stare right at him. It was childish,

but he couldn't help his fear. *What if Grandpa woke up and he wasn't there he was before? What if he couldn't speak normally?*

Two days before Grandpa died, Casey visited him alone. His mom had visited him when Casey was in school earlier that same day; she brought him to see Grandpa later but couldn't go in herself. The day had been a rough one for her. It was near dark when they got to the nursing home. When he walked in, Casey noticed the halls were empty. The check-in list showed all of the other visitors' names were already checked out. He was the only one left.

The hallways were silent and the fluorescent lights were brighter now that they were empty. Casey picked up strange smells while passing some of the rooms which made him quicken his pace. He figured most of the patients were asleep. The silence made him uneasy.

When he got to Grandpa's room, he pushed the door open quietly, as if it might wake the comatose man. He walked in and sat in the seat across from Grandpa's bed. He put his elbow on his knee and rested his chin in his hand. Grandpa looked the same as he did the day before.

Five minutes passed. It was the slowest five minutes of his life, but he would have felt bad if he didn't stay at least that long. When the big hand on the clock read five past eight, he got out of the seat and made his way for the door. Casey's hand almost touched the handle and then stopped.

"Casey."

Casey stopped where he was. Gooseflesh sprouted on the back of his neck. His hand was inches away from the doorknob, yet something possessed him to be still. He wanted to grab the knob and run out of the room. He desperately tried to convince himself that he had heard nothing. Grandpa was asleep. No, Grandpa was *comatose*. He couldn't talk.

But still.

His mind tried to will him forward, but his body did not listen. It turned back around like a rusty hinge. There lay Grandpa, his mouth wide open, his body in the same position it was before Casey turned to leave. There was his right eye, still closed and motionless. There was his left eye, the glass eye, staring right at Casey.

This time, the eye did not roll. It *moved* in its socket. It twitched and blinked, darting from side to side as if it was convulsing to some horrible dance.

Casey could feel his legs buckle beneath him. His heart was running a marathon. He took a step back on noodles for legs, hoping that it was just a trick of the eerie, sterile lights.

But then the eye stopped. It blinked once and centered itself on Casey. He moved back a little more. But when he moved, the eye moved with him.

Casey turned and bolted out the door. The nurse saw him run past the check-in desk and said, "Hon, are you all right?" He ran out the automatic doors and didn't look back.

He didn't go back with his mother to see Grandpa the next day. She didn't question it; she simply thought that it was just too hard for him to handle. That day Grandpa died. Fortunately, he died after she had seen him. Casey's mother was distraught. Casey was bereaved; he cried with his mother, but that guilty conscience felt a pang of relief. Now the eye would not look at him.

Grandpa had wanted a closed casket for his funeral, to which Casey was grateful. He cried there along with his mother and the rest of his extended family, but they were crocodile tears. He loved Grandpa, but he relaxed a little when he thought about how that eye would be buried deep beneath the ground.

A man came up to Casey's mother after the funeral. He was an older man, probably close to Grandpa's age, and he held a small box in his hand.

"I wasn't sure if you wanted this buried with him or if you all wanted to keep it."

He opened the box. It only contained one thing: the glass eye.

Casey felt sick when he looked it. He thought the eye was still staring at him like it did at the hospital. He opened his mouth to say something, but saw that the eye was still. Lifeless.

His mother burst into tears when she saw it. Casey's aunt came over and said, "Not right now." She led his mother away and the man closed the box. He was about to walk away when he saw Casey.

"Are you her son?"

"Yes." He knew what the man was going to ask.

"I suppose you can speak for her. Do you want this?"

Casey wanted to say no. He imagined himself saying, *Bury the thing deep underground! Bury it under him! Make sure it can never see again!*

Before he could answer, his aunt came back over to them and said, "Give it to me." His mother was at the other side of the room with a friend. "We'll keep it."

After the funeral, Casey went back home with his mother. The box was set on the hearth in the living room.

Casey lay on his bed, his shoes pulled off and his tie awkwardly undone.

He stared up at the ceiling, thinking about the glass eye.

*Why did she keep it? Why?*

He scrunched his eyes and wondered,

*Why am I still so afraid?*

He thought back to the hospital room where Grandpa had spent his last days, but that wasn't far enough. Was it right before he got sick? Or was it a couple years back, when Grandpa had that heart attack?

No.

He thought back to the day he first saw one of Grandpa's episodes. He remembered how Grandpa had looked, how he had groaned, how that eye had stared.

Years later, he still remembered everything vividly.

*That eye had moved. Grandpa saw something.*

*It can see things, you know. See other things.*

Casey kept reminding himself it was just the PTSD. That's what his mother had told him. Grandpa just thought about the war and had these episodes.

He told himself that's all it was. But he knew. He knew the glass eye saw *something else*. He knew this was irrational and was old enough to know that monsters from movies and bad dreams weren't real. Yet, he was still haunted by that eye.

Casey got off the bed and hurried from his room. Before passing his mother's room, he glanced through the crack in the door. She lay on the bed, curled into a ball. There was a box of tissues on the nightstand. Casey longed to comfort her. He hoped she was sleeping.

Once he got to the living room, he glanced at the hearth. There sat the box. He walked to the fireplace and stared at the box, wondering about what that could eye could see.

*Does it see another world? Does it see blackness? Does it see at all without its—master?*

He tried to remember other times where he had heard Grandpa mutter Josephine's name. Had he seen her other times too? What does the eye *really* see?

*What if I look into the eye—?*

No.

His hand hovered over the box but retracted it. He gripped his wrist with his other hand, as if the box had burned him somehow.

Casey stood with his hands at his sides, watching the box, waiting for it to do something.

He touched the box.

It was an ordinary little box, but it felt thick and full of life.

His thumb and forefinger gripped the small latch on the front of the box. He thought of Grandpa positioning his fingers around his glass eye and undid the latch. The box opened.

There sat the glass eye. It stared up at him. Casey picked it up, unable to restrain himself, and felt that the eye was still sticky with the same gooey coating it had all those years ago.

The eye looked up at him, yearning for a new master. Casey put it up to his left eye, and looked into it.

He saw a woman sitting by a young man, one with a black hole where his eye should have been. They sat in a small, enclosed structure with a dirt floor. The woman was preparing what looked like some sort of gauze. Then she took the pad and placed it over the man's eye. She bandaged it around his head.

When she finished, he looked at her with his good eye. She leaned in and kissed him.

Just as the woman's hand caressed the man's leg, the vision changed.

Casey saw a jungle. Now he could *hear* things. There was gunfire and explosions. He saw men running between the trees. One man fell to the ground. Another helped him up and put an arm around him. They both tottered through the jungle until they came to a small clearing. There, the wounded man was laid on the ground. Blood seeped through the front of his clothing.

The man who stood above him, tore a piece of his own clothing off and pressed it to the wounded man's chest.

The sounds of gunfire got closer. The uninjured man leaned in close to the other man's face but the gunfire drowned out his words. Then the uninjured man sat up and looked around. An array of voices rang out, accompanied by a shower of bullets. One grazed the uninjured man in the shoulder, and another scraped his face, right above the nose. The man covered his face as he screamed and fell against the wounded man.

The vision changed again. This time to a woman, the same woman as before, dancing in a sunlit room. Her body swayed and shook. She approached Casey and said, "Come. Let's dance!" Casey watched himself dancing with the woman, but it wasn't quite himself. It was he, and it was Grandpa, both of them together as one, twirling the woman around. Then the woman pressed her body against his and said, "Kiss me. Like you did long ago." When he stooped to kiss her, her face changed. It aged rapidly. Her skin fell away as it deteriorated.

The corpse held onto his hands and grinned up at him.

"Come join us. Come join us all!"

The room filled with bodies. Casey looked around and saw men in military uniforms encrusted with crusted blood. One man was missing half of his head, the rest of it purple and coated in dirt. Another stood on stumps for legs, his body covered in mud. One held his own severed arm. Casey saw a bit of bone jutting out of his left shoulder. Another soldier held his gaping stomach wound and motioned towards Casey with his other hand.

"Come join us. Come join your brothers. Come join those you left behind."

Then the corpse smiled.

"We've got a war to win!"

Casey screamed, but nothing came out. Still, he danced with the undead woman. Her gravely, crusted fingers laced tightly around his. Now they all laughed. The sound pierced his eardrums. He tried to look away, but they were everywhere. They were all around him, getting closer and closer, their decaying bodies longing to touch his.

He shook his head, thinking, *No, no, no. Please make it stop. Please make it stop. Oh, God, make it stop!*

He pulled the glass eye away and scrunched his eyelids tightly shut. He stood with the ghostly organ in one hand and the hand against his chest. The thump in his chest was rapid; his breaths were quick.

He stood there for a minute, absorbing the calming silence.

*Throw it away. Throw the eye away.*

He didn't think he could ever think of Grandpa again without seeing those decaying soldiers in his mind.

*How did Grandpa live with it? Could he really see what I just saw?*

Both of his arms were now at his sides, the glass eye still held tightly between two of his fingers.

*Get rid of it. Now. Throw it against the wall to destroy it.*

He held up his arm and cocked it back, his eyes still closed. He didn't want to look at the eye again, but he had to be sure it hit the wall. Casey opened his eyes and his breath caught in his throat.

All of the ghosts he'd seen through the eye now stood in front of him. All of them just as decayed and rotten as they'd been before. But this wasn't from within the eye. This was in *his* world.

The woman stood in the middle of the dreadful circle of visitors. She held out her hands.

*"Let's dance."*

She walked toward him, the rest of the ghouls behind her. Casey realized he still had his arm cocked and ready. He looked up at the eye and then back to the circle of fiends. As the woman's hands closed in on him, he threw the eye.

The eye passed through the woman, her rotted hands grasping at Casey's shoulders. Casey closed his eyes again, anticipating the woman's touch. He opened his eyes at the sound of a thud against the wall. The room was empty. He dared not close his eyes. Instead, he rushed to the other side of the room and picked up the glass eye.

Casey stood there for a moment as his heart thumped. He bent over to pick it up, and felt the eye was no longer coated in a slimy glaze. Yet, when he looked down at the eye, he anticipated another surprise. Nothing happened and he turned it over.

The eye was cracked. Instead of a pale hue it was now a light grey, the pupil, a cloud of drying color.

Casey handled it with care and placed it back into its box. He didn't bother facing the eye forward because he knew it could no longer see.

*It could no longer see other things.*

He closed the box and locked the small latch.

Kait Smith  
*The Shuffle*

“You wan’ help?” I offer.  
“Nope, I’ve got it.” My mom would say.

The scowling sound of heavy furniture being rearranged often filled our family home. My mom was a one-person moving company. She never accepted help — though it was always considered rude not to offer. My mom saw situations that she couldn’t fix; thus, she would rearrange them. It was a coping mechanism for her. Placing her hands on something tangible, heavy, unrelenting and having the power to move it was euphoric to her.

When my brother’s car pulled into our driveway, my legs couldn’t move me fast enough to reach him, hug him. He felt crushable, frail, thinning. His presence brought both elation and unspoken dread. He would sometimes remember to bring gifts in July for a birthday that had happened in February. Every time he emerged, he seemed hazier. Unreachable. Through bloodshot eyes he looked at us, the family he tried to escape. The family that begged him to stay. The strands of our DNA wrapped around us and bridged the gap caused by addiction. He was my brother. Nothing, not even a syringe, could have changed that.

From ages 6-18, I never knew how the house would look or where things would be. I would come through the front door and throw my keys onto the table that should’ve been there only to discover, after the “curplunk” of my keys on the tile floor, that the table was now in the dining room. Equal parts of dread and curiosity would fill me. Hesitantly, I would walk in and begin to ask about my parents’ day and wait for them to mention my brother’s name. Sometimes Mom and Dad would share their struggle of dealing with him, but it was more frequent to see our house rearranged and paint swatches hanging on walls too thin to contain our family pain.

When my brother was arrested and served time in jail, our living room was moved into our dining room. Our dining room replaced the office space. Our office found a new home in the now vacant spot of our living room. When he went to rehab the first time, the rooms were once more reorganized into their previous spots. When he was sober, things stayed in their places for a while. When he was caught and put in rehab again, closets were cleaned out and my sister and I exchanged rooms. When he and his

girlfriend got pregnant, new dining room layout. Things were constantly changing. That was the constant in our family life.

His cyclical motion of dependency would draw us closer to him only to eventually be pushed away. He would be good for a month, two, or even a year; but, somehow, the drug would beckon him back offering: *just one more hit*. Walters went missing, piggy banks broken, relationships bent; there were lectures spoken, prayers raised toward heaven, bail and rehab and lawyer bills, scant Christmas presents, generic name brand food, and a family that was watching, helpless, waiting for him to hit rock bottom.

I held on to hope, white knuckled and unrelenting. But as I sat on the telephone with him two days prior to my graduation, trying to understand his incoherent words, I grew tired. I had grown accustomed to his behavior—never expecting much. I wanted him to be better, I wanted him to be my big brother, but I was afraid that would never happen. Before long, fear replaced hope. Fear of the next phone call. Fear of black dresses and tissue boxes. Fear of graveyards and newly dug graves. I held on to this fear—tight—like the tourniquet around my brother’s arm.

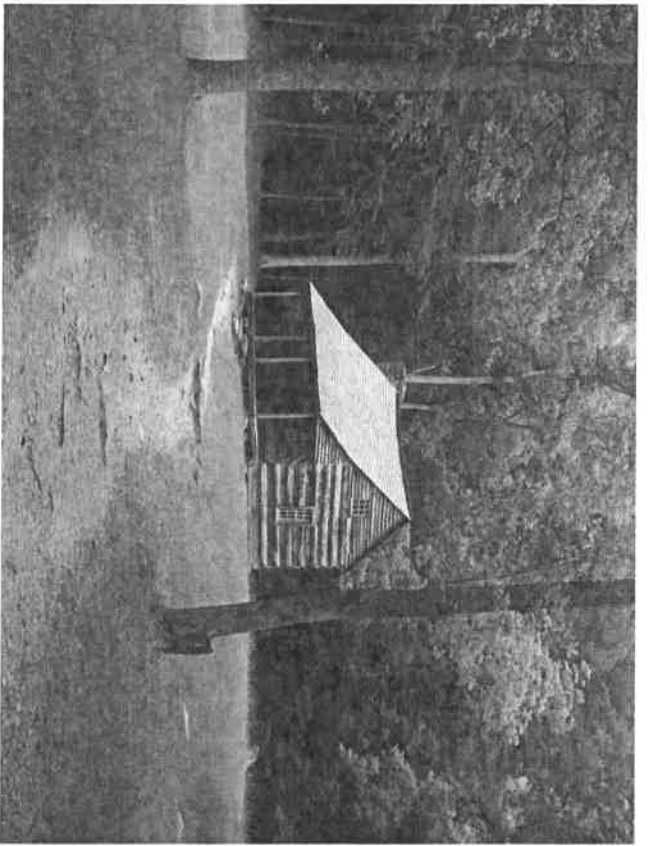
Though it has been seven years in sobriety—I still worry. When he is simply too busy to answer the phone, my inner childhood fear is brought to life again.

I go back to walking in from school and watching my mom in the middle of the furniture shuffle.

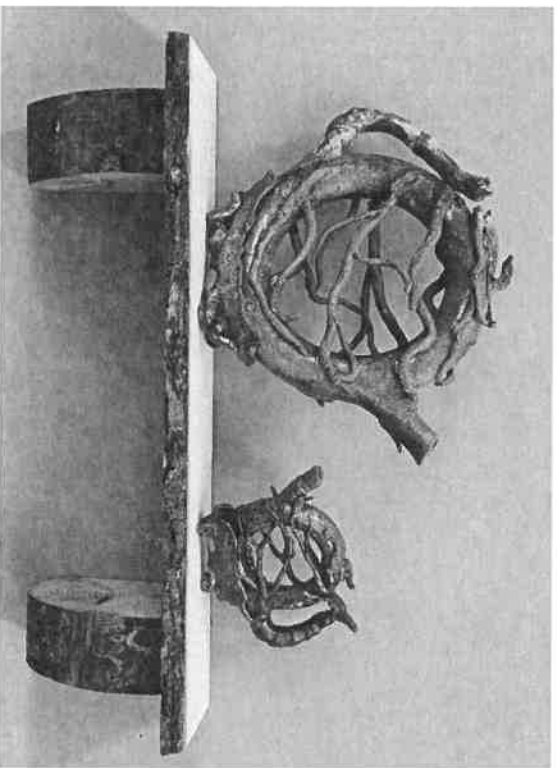
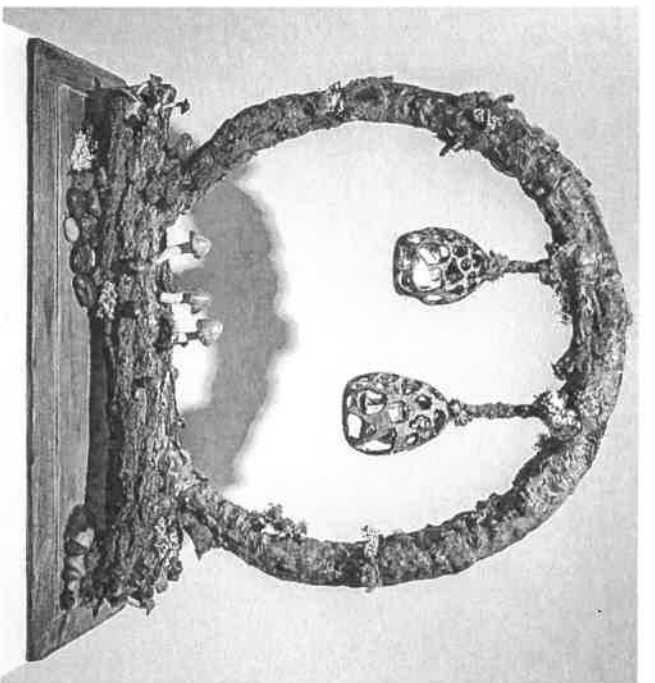
“I feel like I have failed,” my mom had told me.

I wanted to roll my eyes at her and tell her that she was the best mom anyone could ask for. But I knew she wouldn’t believe me. I wanted to ask her about the other three kids she and Dad raised without a drug addiction. I wanted to tell her that I wasn’t a failure. I wanted to tell her that she had done her best, and he made his own decisions. I wanted to tell her so much, but I knew that wasn’t what she needed in that moment.

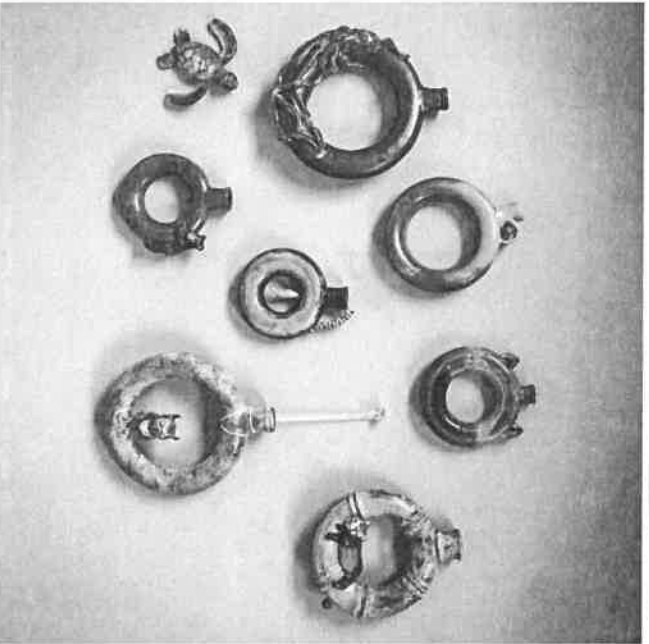
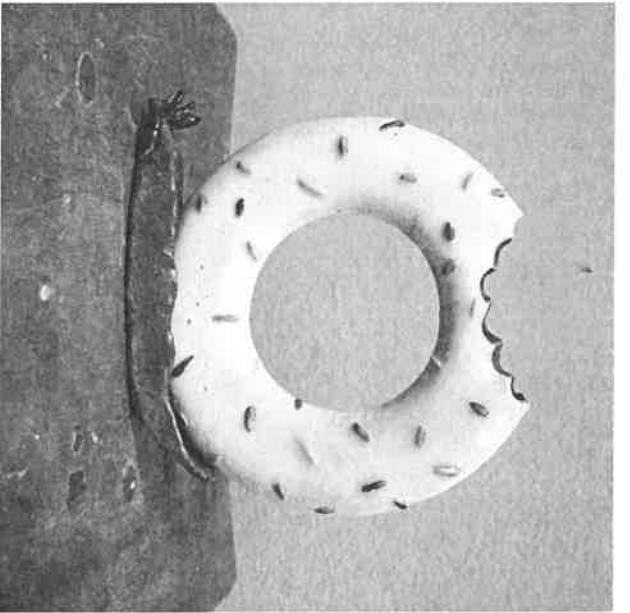
I got on the other side of the couch.  
“Where to?” I asked.



**Sam Siemer**  
*Cades Grove (top) and Buffalo at Custer National Park (bottom) -  
photography*

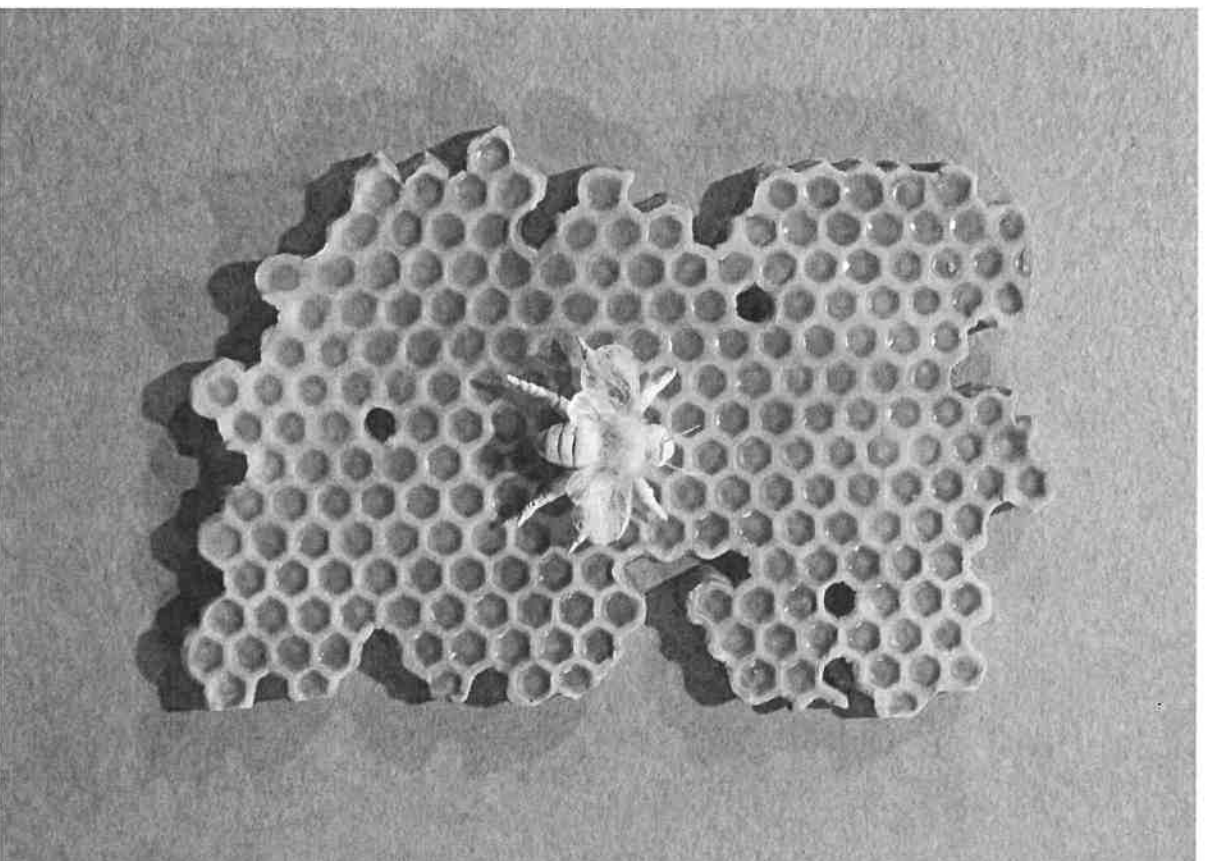


**Benny Poynter**  
*Around the Forest (top) and Tree Pots (bottom) — Ceramic art*



Benny Poynter  
*Nature's Cantens (top) and Sprinkels (bottom) – Ceramic art*

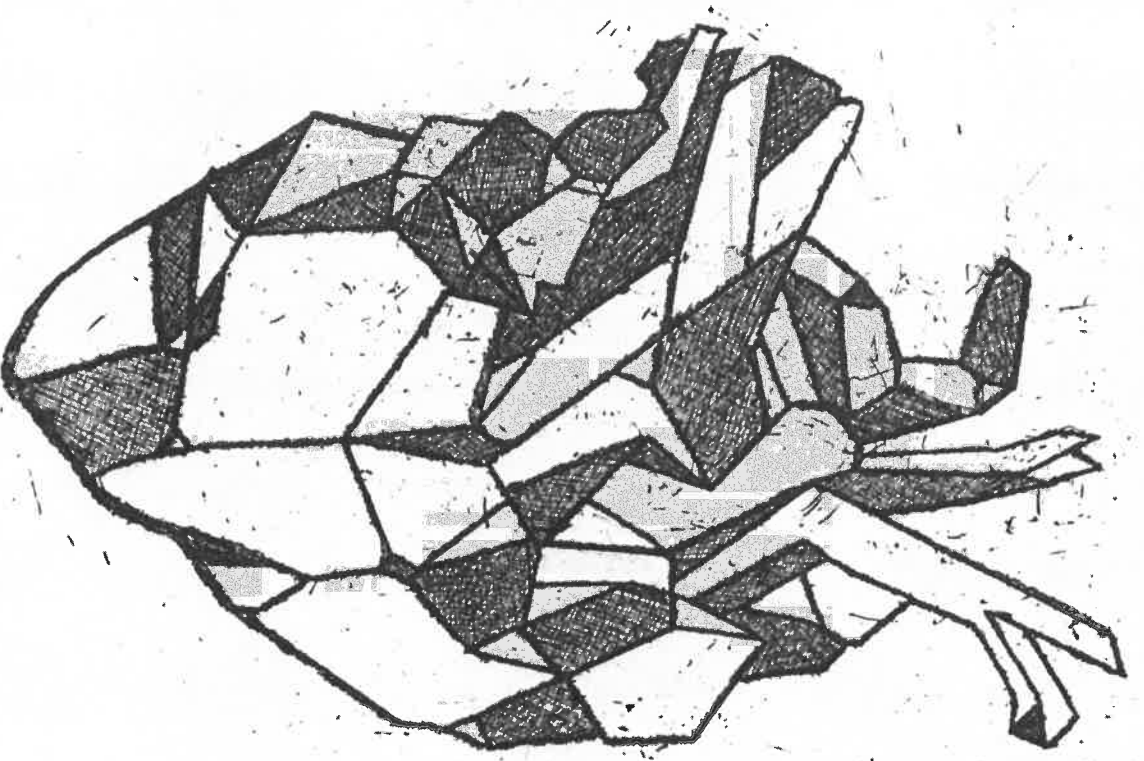
30



Benny Poynter  
*Shrine to the Honey Bee*  
Ceramic Art

31





Kyle Coulter  
*Fragments of Our Hearts*  
Aquatint Zinc Plate Etching

Kristen Cummings  
*Nesting Spider*

the spider died after minutes of suffocating  
from chemical sprays  
loud shrieks from the house owner  
her babies sprung from her womb  
cracking her exoskeleton and crawling into the light

I held the last breath I meant to give you.  
Used it to fill a balloon and tied it to the back of my teeth  
on Tuesday.  
A friend saw it sway behind my eyes this morning.  
*You have a soldier's disease*, she said, and I didn't bother to tell her  
I was once unclaimed territory.  
Once.

When I was younger, I could never fall asleep without the whir of my ceiling fan accompanied by the drifting sound of ambient music. I needed the constant drone to lull me to sleep and to keep my mind from feeling consumed by silence. I needed to be distracted from myself; in silence there was nothing I could cling to. In silence, there was only inescapable drifting. In drifting, there was a restless apathy. In apathy, there was my frustration. I laid on my back and stared at the ceiling, feeling as if I was floating down a placid river painted black by nightfall. My thoughts spilt over the crevices of my mind and entangled themselves in the crooks of my body. It was lying in my bed at night when I first became aware of the feeling of my mind and body being two separate entities. How could I feel attached to another if I didn't even feel attached to myself? I've spent most of my life exploring the breadths of the separation that enfolds us.

My mother stood with her feet spread apart and a silver Kodak camera in her hand. Though she was slim, she believed that she didn't look good enough to wear a bikini. Her hair was tucked into a hat and she wore an off-white cover-up. My father was asleep behind her, his hairy stomach exposed, and his body stretched out on a chair. A beer sat in the sand behind him. She would always let him drink on vacations without complaint.

"Move a little to the left, Mackenzie!" She clicked the camera as I started to turn my body towards the ocean, my feet feeling the scorch of the sand, "Another one," she said, "This time with your sister. Look like you love each other, okay? Humor me." A click evaporated into the air and my mother made a quick motion with her hand, "You're released now."

Without realizing it, I had begun to run to the ocean's edge. I lined my toes with the sea; the water whispered around my feet.

As I waded further in, ribbons of water danced around my thighs and then made their way to my waist. I felt the sand grabbing my ankles as the tide receded, the undercurrent pulsed against my legs which caused my kneecaps to shudder. The waves, once small villages, were becoming empires. I collapsed under their weight, like the sand I was being pulled away to further depths. I became encapsulated, the saline sizzled against my flesh and the current whipped my limbs and water rushed into my lungs and beneath my closed eyelids I could see my body. My mind and body felt stretched apart. It was as if, like a seagull hovering above the water, I was separated from my body and looking down on it. Beneath my eyelids I

could picture my bare skin against the blue of the waves, my golden hair like the tentacles of a squid. My eyes were closed and my mouth parted slightly. My limbs were not limbs but mangled bits of seaweed, and small fish flitted past my spine. Suspended in the water, my body felt a part of something more than itself.

Red bloomed beneath my eyelids; I opened my salt-caked eyes to view the blurred sun, which was perched in the middle of the sky. I had made it to the surface, but the sensation of being divided remained. My lungs reached for air and the tide carried on without care. Through vision blurred by salt water, I watched as humming bodies drifted up and down the beach, unaware of the events that had unfurled within me.

~

“Your grandfather got to see the ocean, at least. That’s more than his father ever got to do,” my grandmother clutched a decaf cup of coffee in her porcelain hands. The ethereal whips of steam that rose from the coffee matched my grandmother’s thin white hair, which she carefully curled every morning.

Her feet always dragged, despite her always correcting me to “Pick your feet up when you walk! Don’t just scoot about. You’ll collect dust!” Wrapped around her finger was her wedding ring, a stone of blue opal. Her husband had been dead for 40 years, leaving her to raise 3 girls in the 1970s by herself.

Her eyes were the color of fog settling over a lake on an autumn morning. I stared past her at the stale, tan wall and the painting adorning it. It was of a small cabin in the Appalachian Mountains where my grandfather grew up along with his three other siblings. The cabin had a porch that had two rocking chairs sitting side-by-side on it. The shutters were a dark blue. The outhouse was erect beside it, a crescent moon carved into the door. A forest of lush green sprawled behind it.

My grandmother’s home was familiar to me growing up. I have hid behind every translucent curtain and been awakened by my grandmother pacing the halls, her anxiety keeping her from drifting into sleep. Her couch and I are intimate. It knows the form of my body well after countless sleepovers. The TV crackled with laughter as 80s sitcom re-runs played in the background. My grandmother sat, hands folded neatly in her lap, her eyes staring unfocused into the dimly lit living room.

“Didn’t you ever consider remarrying or anything?” I sipped on my own coffee which had grown cold. The words felt as if they had wrestled their way out of throat; my grandmother was a sensitive, reserved woman and I feared accidentally upsetting her.

My grandmother’s pale mouth curled upward, “Pfft. No. What was the point? After him, I didn’t need anyone else. He was it. There wasn’t any

time for it. Frankly, I never had an interest.” She paused, “He was a good man. One of the best there was. Although, I may be biased.” She grew silent. Her eyes became unfocused, but carried a quality of shine to them. She twisted her wedding ring absentmindedly.

*How odd it is, I thought, to be in love with something no longer tangible.* The echoes of what were are sewn into the fabric of her skin, as visible as the varicose veins that have carved out paths along her body, creating valleys and mountaintops all the while.

~

I walked down a corridor filled with fluorescent lights. It smelled of disinfectant, stale urine, and mealtoaf. I trailed behind my father. A woman broke the silence of the off-white colored halls and screamed, her voice swelled like a river during a flash flood. “Someone fucking save me! These birches took me from my home! Shirt! They’re going to kill me! I’m going to fucking die in this place.” I didn’t turn around to see her thrashing body in a wheelchair being held down by whatever nurse or nun was assigned to her that day. I knew what she looked like. Pallid skin. Sunken eyes. A mist of paranoia clouded her sagging body.

My father turned around momentarily, a slight smirk rising on his face. His eyebrows, like the roots of an oak tree I spent my childhood summers reading under, knitted together. “Again, as I said the last few times, mom and I don’t really want you saying those words. And this place is safe, dementia affects some people’s minds differently than others.” He led me into a softly lit room. My great-grandmother lied in a cot, her arms to her side, and her entire body stiffened. A teddy bear sat at the edge of her bed and sepia-toned pictures of her family adorned the wall. The TV was on, despite no one ever watching it. Her mouth was slightly ajar and her eyes were wild. I sat on a chair and watched my dad hold her hand before brushing her wispy hair. She asked us who we were, her voice like creaking floorboards in an asbestos-lined house.

“I’m your oldest grandson, Mike, and this is my daughter, Mackenzie.” His voice felt distant and despite his 6’5 frame, he seemed shrunken. He shrugged off his navy jacket and feigned a smile. As he always does when feeling awkward, he rubbed the side of his neck in a slow, arduous movement. I remained sitting in my chair, content to observe but not to interact.

“I didn’t know I had grandchildren. I’m not that old.” Her head lolled to the side and she stared out the 2-paned window.

A few weeks later we found out that my great-grandmother jumped out of her window. Granted, it was a first-floor window, but she was a 93-year-old. The nurses found her with a broken hip in the bushes mumbling about how she “just wanted some fresh air. The children looked so happy.”

There was a playground across the street from the nursing home with a winding slide and colorful swings. My grandfather always said that my great-grandmother must've been tempted by that playground, which was seen clearly from her window, every day. In her mind time had died and with it the perception of herself and all that made her who she was.

The fall led to her eventual death. At her funeral I curled my hands around the edge of the silver casket. I could smell the powder of her makeup and she wore a dress the color of a blue jay's wings. I felt the urge to peel open her eyelids to see if her eyes looked as absent as they always did when I knew her. The death of a mind and the death of a body don't always intersect.

My ankles were crossed on the dashboard and a book laid open in my lap. The radio was set to NPR and I watched the familiar blurs of landscape that passed by my window. Sun escaped through the slants of the trees and painted the usually grey and stained van interior to a silky amber. My mother mumbled about traffic and I turned to look towards the other half of the interstate. Sirens and revving engines and honking cars created a cacophony of human impatience.

His body was a blur across my vision. I imagined stumbling upon him in the rubble of Rome, a prisoner still splayed out on his cross. Instead, he was splayed out on I-64, smoke emulating from bits of what looked like was once a motorcycle.

The image of his mangled body was inescapable. I sewed myself to the presence, or rather the emerging absence, of his body; I felt my nails dig into my arms out of nervousness, a reminder of my own existence.

My feet withdrew themselves from the dash and we sat in silence before my mom mumbled that she was sure that it wasn't fatal but that I should "never get on a motorcycle, they're death sentences." Later, sitting in a Wal-Mart parking lot, the radio announced his death. They did not give the body a name, only an age. He was in his 20s. He was on a motorcycle. He was hit by a semi on I-64 East. The semi came away unscathed. There was still on-going traffic from the incident.

*How many people care more about having to sit in traffic than the death of someone who was completely intact only a few hours ago?*

We drove the winding way home, the sun turning the grey to amber, my eyelids flitted like a hummingbird's wings. I rolled down the window and the wind was gentle. I smelled the fumes of human consumption. I could see myself in the rearview mirror, my reflection was smeared in dust. The golden tendrils of my hair sacrificed themselves to the weight and pull of the screaming wind, tangling and untangling themselves, transient lives fleeing past one another.

Back in my room, the wind berated the window, the sound of a tea kettle demanding to be noticed. Snow buried the mostly faded green grass of my suburban neighborhood; footprints littered the ground. My eyes were fixated on a dull pool of yellow light leaking from a streetlamp outside and through the haze of sheer, purple curtains. The lights in my room were turned off. I felt my image bleed into the shadows. The whir of my ceiling fan matched the droning sound within my head.

I sat on the edge of my bed, an extra-large t-shirt draping my small frame, and began compulsively digging my nails deep into the skin of my exposed thighs, furiously threading myself into the fabric of my fatigued flesh. I bit down on my tongue as to not let noise escape my mouth and felt pressure ensnare me. My nostrils flared open and pain settled into my temples; I let my nails go deeper, my mind searching for the sensation of splintering skin. The dull light of the streetlamp seemed to intensify and I could feel my body and mind unite under the rule of pain, ribbons of electricity coiling around my hungry and scrawny legs. The ceiling fan above me, a pulsating tide, reverberating in and out of my consciousness.

It was not in pain, I later found, where I was able to close the dissonance within myself. It was in the observance of others. I lie in my bed at night and I feel as if I'm floating down a river painted black by night fall. In the river I turn my head to see millions of other bodies floating past each other, soft blurs in the dark. Some are unaware of the each other's existence. Some are invariably intertwined into another. Others' presence in the river is already fading, their bodies mostly sunken in the depths. It's in the blurs of human existence where I find that the breadth of separation that enfolds us is also what binds us.

Chad Dunbar  
*The Modern Redefinition*

These are the days of modern redefinition,  
When making a decision  
Becomes a vice-versa witch-hunt,  
With real life monsters  
Stalking you through the corridors  
Of unsure mindscapes,  
Leaving common sense and innocence  
Blighted by white lies  
And turning the other cheek.  
The week must get strong  
In the following trials and tribulations  
Of an undefined generation.  
Hope and expectations  
Become senseless frustrations,  
And deluded hallucinations,  
Of forgotten aspirations  
In the subconscious imagination.  
The normal becomes strange,  
It meets you halfway.  
Then saves the day,  
Just to lead you astray.  
The past's perfection is now deception.  
Witness the eyes of the beholder...  
Freedom disintegrated,  
Until its stagnated nonsense  
Promising fame,  
Promising to change its engrained ways.  
The immaculately conceived  
Are now falsely perceived.  
The pure and holy are now condemned  
As dream fragments in the minds of men,  
Wandering through levels of vertigo:  
Consumerism's three-ring circus show.  
The infernal is now seen as divine,  
Defined as the new paradigm  
Of the changing times,  
With lustful vampires...  
Playing with hearts,

Playing with minds.  
Life signs become flat lines,  
Social Pantomimes  
Smoking dimes to the mind  
As the heart pumps strychnine.  
The catalyst for the creation of an anarchist  
Is where the known  
Becomes unknown.  
Are we afraid to let go?

“You’re never going to beat the crowd if you don’t leave before five,” Dad yelled. He became testier and more agitated since the beginning of the calamity. We were all so thirsty. Mom missed the sight of the once abundant liquid gold. I think Dad missed fishing more than anything - I can’t imagine picking up dry, dead fish from the seashore being as exhilarating as tackling a twenty-pound Red Snapper from the bow of a boat in the Gulf.

It had been almost three months and the supermarkets had started to dry up. Thankfully, Mom employed a rationing system that would keep us damp-mouthed and semi-clean for another three weeks or so - many families drank their entire city council-issued ration within the first four or five weeks. The council promised they would be back with more water but they never came back.

Every morning she would set small cups, full of clean water - which she kept cool behind the drywall in the basement - on the table. I guess we had it a lot easier than some of the more southern states. Temperatures weren’t as high, at least not yet.

My brother, Bryce, joined us for breakfast in the hardwood-floored kitchen and ruffled my already messy hair.

“How’d you sleep big guy?” he said.

I told him about my dreams of swimming in what used to be Lake Michigan, where he taught me how to swim when I was eight.

Anna woke up groggy in the mornings. She was nine - five years younger than I was and nine younger than Bryce - she couldn’t understand how all of this had happened. None of us could. Nonetheless, Mom had faith in the idea that this was all part of God’s plan. My brother and I never bought into her southern beliefs when it came to God. In fact, this whole debacle made me question if there even was a God.

6oz in the morning, 8oz at lunch and 4oz before bed. We all indulged in our consignments differently. Anna poured hers into a small Styrofoam bowl of macaroni and cheese and heated it in the microwave. Bryce used his to whisk up a mixture that would make two small chocolate chip pancakes. Mom warmed hers on the stove and let a bag of tealaves bask for about 15 minutes until it turned a translucent brown. Dad would sip his like an espresso while he read old newspapers, looking senselessly at the news before the beginning of this death period.

I swallowed mine in one gulp. Sometimes I swooshed it around in my mouth to moisten the cracks on my gums and the inside of my cheeks.

I had the idea that once the winter months came, I would freeze my cupful outside in the callous Midwestern winds and suck on the ice. I figured it would be better to make it last for as long as I could.

Bryce and I left the house at 5 a.m., as we did most mornings. In the beginning, we wouldn’t sleep out of fear that we’d miss our 4:40 a.m. alarm - an alarm that would have us well on our way to the community well by 5 a.m. Once there, folks lined up and received three chances at pumping water from the pump in front of Town Hall, before eventually stepping aside for the next hopeful family. In the first few days, some people managed to pump small buckets of water, but the pump produced nothing at all in the last five days.

Some would say the Rosary as they tried to pump the “nectar of the earth.” Other non-Midwesterners performed obscene rain dances, which they hoped would better their odds of drawing water from the pits of this waterless earth.

We gave up on believing that one day the pump would burst into the cloudless sky and shower our parched bodies, which coiled like a snake around the peeling statue of an old local baseball hero. Before the statue dried up, it was a wonderful fountain where people tossed in pennies for good luck.

Though Bryce and I never said it, it was just enjoyable to spend time with one another, away from the nagging comments from my Dad about the lack of any real solutions to the drought, that we needed to *look out for our own*. And, of course, the overly optimistic yawning from my mother.

We cut our ankles walking through the baron cornfields. The soles of our feet burned from the melting asphalt on Main Street. People shuffled onto the once grassy area by the purposeless fountain, though the dusty topsoil was becoming sandy and was hotter than the flaking cement by mid-day.

I looked across the bustling square and wondered what would happen if this calamity never ended.

We walked by the fountain to the tail of the line. People had become more agitated as the dry days passed. They had started to perish; many of the elderly had died or wished they had already. Young children were usually given priority, but I sensed that the townspeople were becoming greeder and more concerned about their own state.

It’s been three months; still no water.

The next day, Bryce and I started on our routine morning trek later than usual. The sun started to rise from the dusty fields adjacent to our house and the earth crunched like crispy fall leaves underfoot. Though it was usually too dark to see them, we knew that many of the townspeople crossed the baron fields to get to the town square more quickly. With the sun giving glow silhouettes of families on the far side of the field.

We saw people running across the field. For the most part, people had become lethargic from the dehydration and didn’t exert much energy doing anything at all.

“Where are they in such a hurry to?” I said to Bryce, who was already starting to pick up his pace.

“I don’t know, man,” Bryce said, now jogging. “But I bet it’s something we won’t want to miss.”

I hurried to catch up with Bryce - a difficult task.

Bryce was the pride of school athletics. He was set to be the first cross-country runner in ten years to receive a scholarship to run at college. He had committed to go run at Penn State in the fall. Still now, on days when it wasn't so hot, he'd go run. My Mom pleaded with him not to go. "There's no point, Bryce," she would cry out the door as he left.

When we reached the gate of the field, more people, from other directions, were hurrying toward the town square.

"You think they've found a well?" I asked Bryce hopefully. "I haven't seen anyone in this kind of a rush since the first couple of mornings."

"I'll bet they've found *something!*" Bryce said, parting his brow with his shirtleeve. "Old Mr. Harris wouldn't be scurrying for nothing."

When we arrived at the square, we stood eagerly behind the floods of people circling the fountain. Bryce picked me up and put me on his shoulders to see what was happening.

"Trucks. About twenty of them. And there's a big bubble over the fountain," I said, squinting to see through the still rising sun.

"What do you think it is?" Bryce said curiously. "We've not seen or heard anything from anyone outside of this town in weeks."

It was the kind of town that other Midwesterners knew only from passing through. The mayor and other elected officials, people said, had fled shortly after they realized this wasn't a short-term problem.

Bryce took me down from his shoulders and I tried to weave my way through the crowd but people weren't in the mood to let anyone cut them in line this morning.

"I heard whispers that they've hit something deep, think they've found some water," Mrs. Hanley said to us. She was the mail lady of the town. She knew everyone and their business. My Mom used to say that Mrs. Hanley would nosily open up people's personal letters before she delivered them.

"Joe McKinney said he saw the fountain erupt for about thirty seconds at around 3am," Old Mr. Harris said, catching his breath as he finally joined the crowd. "Apparently, the ground was so hot and dry that it soaked it all up before anyone else could notice. You can still see some darker patches around the fountain where the water was."

Bryce pulled me to the side, a few steps away from the rest of the crowd. "Listen. If they *have* found a source of water, it's never going to dampen our poor mouths. I've heard similar stories about towns like ours; they come and extract everything they can, then bring it back to those little camps they have - keep it for themselves," he said.

"They?" we learned later, were groups of scientists and businessmen who were trying to find the root of the drought. It was as if the earth soaked up all the water and kept it hidden away from lakes and wells. After a few visits in the

early stages of the drought, it became apparent that "they" were only concerned with harvesting what water they could find for themselves.

"But how can they just do that? It's in *our* town," I said, looking back at the bustling crowd.

"They can do whatever they want," Bryce said. "And besides, everyone here is too beat to do anything about it."

Bryce sat down on the bed of an abandoned dust-covered truck. His face fell into his hands.

I stood up on the truck bed beside him. Through the sandy cloud hovering about the field, I saw our house. Beside our house was a big red barn where my granddad had kept horses. In the barn was a long trough with its own water line from a couple of towns over. I remembered my granddad telling me it had its own waterline and everything. *Cleanest water in the town*, he'd say. *They installed it back in the twenties when our water got contaminated with Pellagra.*

I jumped down from the truck bed and started running toward the cornfield.

"Bryce we need to get home," I yelled back.

"What's the rush?" Bryce shouted, curiously.

"Now, Bryce. Come on!"

When we arrived back at the house, Dad was sweeping the sand and dust from the sidewalk in front of our house. We ran right past him and headed for the barn.

"What's going on?" Dad said, stopping and leaning on his broom.

"Dad, follow us!" I yelled.

"Will you just tell us already?" Bryce said, stopping and leaning on the garden fence.

I tried to pry open the barn door but I needed Bryce or Dad's help - it hadn't been opened since my granddad died a few years ago. Dad kept some tools in there some times but that was about it.

"The trough!" I proclaimed, still catching my breath and sweating profusely at this stage. "Granddad's trough for the horses!"

Bryce and my dad gasped. Dad wedged the broom against the handle of the barn door. He kicked the bristled end of the broom, causing a tiny red cloud of rust around the handle.

"I can't believe I never thought of it," Dad said bewildered. "That was his best kept secret - *cleanest water in town.*"

Dad swung the tall door open. It was like being under murky water: I couldn't see the other side of the barn. Mice scampered past our feet. Sunlight seemed to hover in the barn, and it smelled of rotting hay and rat droppings.

There it was. At the back of the barn, the trough looked like an altar. The metal had rusted significantly and a thick layer of dust, hay, and mold plastered the metal.

We rushed over to the trough. Bryce and I were still dripping sweat from the run home. Dad grabbed his tool kit by the door and took out a wrench. The handle to the faucet was broken so Dad had a tough time gripping the rusty strump, where the handle had been, with the wrench. It had become more rounded and harder to grip.

Dad started to have some success. The wrench seemed to be moving slightly.

"What are you going to do if there *is* water here, Dad?" I asked. "Surely they'll find out and drain it like they've done to the rest of them."

"If this thing explodes with water, son," Dad said, trying hard to pull the wrench toward him. "We won't be telling anyone. Your granddad never told a soul about this; knew he'd get in trouble for not paying water taxes."

"What about the other people in the town?" I asked.

"What about them?" Bryce said, slapping me in the back of the head. "You saw those *animals* this morning. You think they'd tell *us*?"

With a noisy heave from Dad, the faucet erupted. Glassy water sprayed out in all directions, deflecting rapidly off the dirty metal trough. It glistened in the floating sunlight in the middle of the barn.

I held out my tongue to catch what I could in my mouth. The water wasn't cold but we didn't care. Bryce turned two buckets upside down and joined me in catching the raining water.

Dad blocked his face from the backlash of water and closed the faucet enough to slow down the stream to a steady downward flow.

"Quick! Grab the buckets," Dad said. "And go get whatever you can from the house. A cup. A bowl. Old bottles. Whatever!

Bryce and I returned back to the barn a couple of minutes later. The second bucket was nearly full. Dad looked the happiest I'd seen him in a long time. He cupped water into both hands and slurped it noisily from his palms.

"Get over here, you two," he said, coaxing us over to him. "Bryce, go get your mother and sister too."

"They're already on the way," Bryce replied.

Bryce and I hunkered down beside Dad and did as he did, cupping our hands together and slurping. The water was getting colder; it was wonderful. My tongue expanded and softened like a sponge after it's been dried out. Mom helped Anna cup the water in her hands. Her cracked lips and shriveled tongue seemed to heal almost instantly.

"We can't drink too much at once!" Mom commanded. "Or we'll be sick."

We sipped slowly for about twenty minutes. When I thought I'd had enough, I dipped my head in the bucket of water, and let my tongue and mouth soak.

"What do we do now?" Bryce asked.

"Nothing!" Dad snapped. "We save as much of this as we can too. We don't know how long it'll last."

"Surely there are some people we can let in, Dad, no?" I said. "Old Mr. Harris looked awful today, and one of the Radley's twins died yesterday, apparently."

"Listen, we can't ruin this for ourselves. If we tell one person, they'll tell one *more* person. Before we know it, we'll have a line of people around the house. Or worse the government will come knocking; then we're really screwed."

We sat by the trough for a little while longer before going back inside the house with our buckets and cups, full of water. I couldn't help but think of my friends from school, our neighbors. I felt guilty that *my* family had all of this water and they had none. I was embarrassed and ashamed of my Dad for not sharing our secret supply with anyone.

That night, Mom boiled pasta and mixed it with a jar of marinara sauce she'd been keeping. It tasted so good. It wasn't until all of this happened that I realized how much we used water. Dad couldn't get his daily paper anymore because they'd stopped printing.

"Can't run a paper mill without water, boy," he'd told me.

Our neighbors, the Cunninghams, had drained the radiator in their car and filtered the water through cotton shirts. Mr. Cunningham died three days ago from dehydration.

The hospitals were working with little efficiency now, so when people got sick there was less and less one could do to save them.

Maybe it was the comfort of my moistened mouth, or clean face, but I couldn't sleep that night. Bryce snored heavily in the bed across from me. I could only think of how the other people in the town felt. We had rationed our government supply, so we were at least coping with the drought. But, others had consumed everything in the first few days, taking the city council's promise that they'd return with more water for granted.

Dad was sure that no good would come of telling anyone about our secret supply.

"Don't breathe a word of this to anyone!" he'd warned me before I went to bed. "Tomorrow, you and Bryce will still go to the fountain and act like we're none better than anyone else."

"But what about the Ra-" I had protested.

"They'll have to figure it out for themselves; just like we did!" he interrupted.

"Mom?" I whispered. "Don't you think we should tell someone?"

"We should listen to your father," she said, looking sorrowfully at the floor.

Bryce snored heavier than before.

"Bryce?" I whispered. "Bryce!"



I got up and sat on the end of Bryce's bed. I shook his shoulder until one of his eyes opened. He sprang up to a sitting position.

"What-What's wrong?" he said, catching his breath.

"Nothing!" I said. "I need your help."

"What is it?" he asked, still coming around from waking up.

"We need to bring some water to the Cunningham's. Mom and Dad just went to bed."

"Are you crazy?" he exclaimed. "If Dad catches us, he'll kill us."

"He won't catch us. We won't even use our own buckets. They've got two three-gallon buckets on their porch; I saw them this morning." I said, hopeful that he would help me. "But, I can't carry both of them on my own."

"Maajaan," Bryce moaned quietly. "We better not get caught. Just this one time, and they don't know it's us that gave it to them."

"That's fine," I said, pulling the blanket off him. "Come on, let's hurry." We tiptoed down the stairs, skipping the bottom two squeaking steps.

The Cunningham house was about two hundred yards away in the direction of the town center. We left the house, leaving the door cracked behind us. The road was strangely bright from the moonlight.

When we reached the Cunningham's the front porch light was on.

"That them?" Bryce said, pointing at two large red buckets.

"Yes!" I said, rushing over to grab them.

"Be quiet!" Bryce snapped quietly. "They can't know it was us. And we'll be in worse trouble if we're caught stealing someone's buckets — they'll know something's up!"

I stepped up onto the porch and grabbed the buckets from beside the door.

"Come on, let's go," Bryce said.

We saw a light upstairs turn on in the window. We took off running back up the road toward our house.

I lagged behind, carrying the buckets.

When we made it back to the house, we went straight into the barn. The moonlight beamed down through the big gap onto the ground in the center of the barn.

"I can't see anything," Bryce complained.

"Give it a couple of minutes," I said. "Your eyes will adjust."

I made my way over to the trough at the back of the barn, running my hands along the wall. Bryce was waiting by the barn door keeping watch for Dad.

"I need that wrench," I called over to Bryce, who was rubbernecking out the door, not paying much attention to me anymore. "Bryce!"

He popped his head in.

"The wrench," I said again.

Bryce dug around inside the tool kit by the door, pulled out the wrench and threw it to me, landing on the ground in front of me.

I positioned the wrench in place, like Dad had, and heaved it away from me. It didn't budge. I tried a couple more times and still no movement.

"What's going on in there?" Bryce whispered in.

"I can't turn it," I said, exasperated. "I need your help."

Bryce sighed, looking around outside one more time and hurried over to me.

"Give it here," he commanded. "And get the buckets ready, we can't leave any wet patches here or Dad'll wonder what happened."

With one great pull towards his chest, Bryce opened the faucet to a steady drip.

I placed one of the buckets under the faucet. Then Bryce opened it to a steady stream. Within a minute the bucket was almost full and I placed the second one underneath.

"Don't fill them too much," I said. "We don't want to spill any on the way."

As the second bucket was almost full, Bryce closed the faucet again. We walked the long way around the side of the house, on the other side of my parents' bedroom, so as not to be heard. The ground was so crunchily that it made it difficult to sneak around without someone hearing your footsteps.

As we approached the Cunningham's, Bryce noticed that the porch light and light upstairs was turned off. We paused. Joey, the eldest son, was walking back inside from the porch.

Joey had gone to school with Bryce. They were the most competitive runners on the team. He had left for the Marines his junior year. Bryce didn't know he had come back.

We stepped forward. The moonlight was still bright enough to light up the porch.

"Joey?" Bryce whispered, as we got closer.

Joey's head was buried in his hands. He popped it up quickly.

"Huh?" he said.

I pulled Bryce behind the side of the house.

"What are you doing?" I whispered. "He can't know we came!"

"What? Why- I covered Bryce's mouth with my hand.

"Who's there," Joey called out.

After a few more seconds, we heard the front door close. I peaked around the corner to make sure Joey had gone back inside.

"Come on! Quick!" I said to Bryce, who was carrying the spilling buckets around to the porch. "Leave them there and let's get out of here."

"I don't see why we've got to be so secretive? We're helping them!" Bryce said.

"Exactly," I said, "And we want to keep helping them."

Bryce looked back at me with a confused look on his face.

"If Dad finds out, we won't be able to help anyone," I said.

I dug around my backpack and pulled out a pen and paper.  
*Leave the buckets under the porch. Please don't seek us out. We only want to help.*

I had seen Joey's sister, Gretchen, one morning at the square. She looked terrible. Her lips were scabbed from the cracks. Her face was white as her eyes were. Her pupils were tiny. She looked so frail, like a dried out grapefruit. Tears were dried out around her eyes forming a crust across her eyelashes.

When we arrived back to our house. Mom was sitting on the couch.

"I saw you two leave," she said.

I put my chin against my chest.

"That was a nice thing you did," she went on.

I looked up at her. She was smiling at me as softly as Ms. Cunningham was before.

"Now, back to bed," she said, standing up. "Before your Dad wakes up."

Bryce and I walked down the hallway, back to our room. Mom stopped me, letting Bryce walk ahead.

"I'm proud of you, son," she said, wrapping her arms around me.

She kissed my cheek and gave me one big squeeze before letting go.

"Goodnight, Mom," I said smiling back at her.

I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow that night. Bryce snored heavily again in the bed across from me. I felt lighter than I had since the beginning of this drought.

## Taylor Carter *The Carter Family Case File*

### Overview

Your family has a long, exuberant history with the adoption of stray or previously unwanted animals. They come from far and wide: family friends, acquaintances, Craigslist, people on your mother's mail route. But in the end, they all ended up under the Carter family care.

● **Hercules:** Your first pet, a dachshund that your sister bit on the spine when you were three and she was one. Their incompatibility was so bad that you were forced to give him away.

● **Moose:** The grey Weimaraner that jumped through the screen window of the dining room and disappeared after seeing a deer at the edge of the woods.

● **Rex:** Your second grade classroom's pet iguana that you volunteered to watch over Christmas break (without telling your parents beforehand). His cage sat on the dining room table throughout the snowy winter, marble eyes watching as you snuck into the kitchen for midnight Oreos.

● **Unnamed:** The basset hound puppies that were stolen from your yard while you played across the street with the neighbors. Your mother gave chase in the tan minivan to no avail.

● **Sir Finkelberg III:** A goldfish won at the county fair who lived atop your dresser for five more years than the expected two weeks.

● **Cosmo & Wanda:** Two ferrets that made the sunroom smell of molded tube socks but were fun to play with nonetheless.

● **Wall-E:** A chinchilla, your 16th birthday present, whose fur felt the way you imagined seeing the Aurora Borealis would feel like. Unreal.

The animal activity in your home died down as you entered high school, your sister claiming ownership of the miniature Italian greyhound, Suzie, the only four-legged member of the household at the time, which your mother received from an elderly friend. Then your mother brings home another adoptee from her mail route, a King Charles spaniel mix, Sully, that you and your brother claim as your own and your heart is full.

But then your sister texts you a picture of a nine-month old golden retriever that a friend found and says,

*Should I bring him home?*

*Text mom and convince her.*

Logically, you know you should not comply, but your heart swells to a painful size with hopeful ownership. You feel a slight twinge of headache behind your right temple, and your eyes become strained while admiring the photo your sister sent, attempting to take in every detail on the small screen. If this is happening to you, you may be suffering from *Overactive Caninus Sensory Affection*.

## Symptoms

- A heightened sensitivity to all things cute, fuzzy, or both. In extreme cases, quickening of your heart rate and palpitations when thinking about the golden puppy with a white stripe across his nose.
- Development of what experts call *Infantilis Pyrexia*—commonly known as Baby Fever—except with puppies, scientifically known as *Canis Lupus Pyrexia*. Symptoms of this disease involve the irresistible urge to pet strangers’ dogs on the street and constantly asking your siblings when they will have their own, so you can gain the satisfaction of puppy ownership without gaining the responsibility.
- Excessive *pro and con* list making.
  - *Pro*: Playing with the puppy. Walking the puppy. Looking at the puppy. You’ll be in ownership of more puppies. There will be one puppy for each child, tipping the human: canine ratio of your household into more equal odds. Equality is good. You need the puppy to achieve equality.
  - *Con*: Larger quantities of dog food that you are not paying for. You don’t *actually* live there. Your sister is soon to be married and she will not live there either. After your brother graduates high school, your mother will be left alone with three dogs (not exactly a con). Your mom wants a cat.

## Self-Care

- Interaction with the already existing canines of your household. If unable to perform this task due to the fact that you live hundreds of miles away because you have to get an education, interaction with other canines of similar color and build may substitute. In the event that there are no canines in your accessible vicinity, other furry animals, such as cats, hamsters, or horses may be substituted, but will yield lesser results.
- Avoid intrusive daydreams of walking and playing with the new puppy by engaging in media that evokes sadness, fear, anger, or any other emotion that will deter you from the adoption process.
  - *Warning!* Common side effects of engaging in the recommended readings and watching include development of a passionate hatred for the film and print industry for making you experience the usually unwelcomed emotions. Though unfortunate, this anger will also help in your fight against OCSA.
- **Recommended Readings & Watching**
  - Your Economics Textbook
    - No one enjoys their economics class. Even the ones who major in the subject don’t enjoy it. If they say they do, they’re lying.
  - *Manley & Ma* by John Grogan // Robert Stevenson’s *Old Yeller* (1957)

- **Spoiler Alert**: The dogs die, guys. Save yourself from the emotional rollercoaster. Don’t adopt a dog that might die someday.
- Disney Pixar’s *Carz 2* (2011)
  - Dubbed as the black sheep of the Pixar universe, this atrocious “comedy” may smear the good name of Pixar you previously held. I would suggest *Ball or Up*, but those depictions of dogs are wonderful. Stay away from those serotonin triggers.

## When to Take Action

If none of these self-care tips alleviate the pain of not having that small, golden angel in your life, the only option you have to survive is to convince your mother to accept this puppy into your home. Follow these steps to ensure positive results.

1. Initiate: Text your mother,  
MOM CAN WE ADOPT THIS PUPPY  
*Three dogs for three kids, it makes sense.*  
She texts back,  
*U both are gangging up on me aren't u?*
2. Facebook Pettion: There is no better way to convince someone to do something than through peer pressure. Generally, you should not advocate for peer pressure, but there are exceptions to every rule, especially when puppies are involved. Upload a screenshot of the text conversation with your mother to Facebook. Tag her in the photo. Tag your brother and sister in the photo. Make the photo accessible to the maximum amount of people. You’ll receive 51 likes and 12 comments.
3. Rally the Troops: Text your younger brother, the only one who actively lives at home. You have both argued in the past who is the *actual* owner of Sully. You know he’ll jump at the chance to have his own dog.  
*Jared, text mom and tell her you want to adopt this puppy.*  
He texts back in his usual shorthand,  
*Ok*  
*I want it today*
4. Reconfirm Your Position: An hour later, your sister texts you,  
*I think I'm going to bring him home. Mom doesn't know.*  
You text back, using your imaginary eldest sibling authority,  
*Do it.*

## Results

Three hours later your family grows by one and your mom posts a picture of the newest canine resting on your living room sofa with the caption: “When three kids gang up on you, this happens.” This photo will receive 107 likes and 18 comments. You are elated and your heart pumps more blood than it should, but the pain has been replaced with happiness. You have your puppy. His name is Scout and he’s very happy.

James O'Bannon  
*Food Stealing Kills Relationships*

You stole a fry from my plate,  
which wasn't why.

The Lakers lost and my grandma was  
dying and the sun wasn't  
bright enough, but I was so focused  
on that fry. You  
sent me a postcard from Italy and  
a picture of your wedding ring and  
the note said you didn't want to  
come back.

*People Watching at Venice Beach*

Who are you? and why are you  
here, looking at the sunrise like  
it's the one who broke you and  
left you in the rain with your son  
who barely knew any better, but turns the  
card his dad gave him in his hand like it  
just might bring him back.

Someone said "the sun's not going anywhere"  
but you know it might.

CONTRIBUTORS

ERNEST ALEXANDER (Alex Steele) is a freshman at Northern Kentucky University who is majoring in theatre. His writing highlight the small details of life that connect to form giant memorable moments. Coffee Table was part of a movement Alex wrote focusing on the life of objects and their positioning in the world.

MD BELL is from Lebanon, Kentucky. She is a senior studying a Bachelor of Art in Integrative Studies with focuses in creative writing, women and gender studies, freedom studies, and social justice. After her undergraduate career she plans to pursue her passion for writing and education by traveling, then studying an M.F.A. in creative writing, and later studying to get her PhD. In her down time, she likes to cuddle her cat Tezai.

TAYLER CARTER is an NKU senior who, by the print date of this journal, should have graduated with a bachelor's degree in electronic media and minor of creative writing. You can probably find her wandering around a museum somewhere, trying to figure out what to do with her post-graduation life. This is her fourth publication in an NKU-based journal (others: *Loch Norse*, *Pentangle*, and *True NKU*).

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KYNDRA HOWARD is majoring in English with a focus in writing studies. She is from Louisville, Kentucky. "Introduction to Philosophy" was inspired by her first semester taking PHI 101 with Professor Dennis Miller. It is a description of a notable moment of self-reflection while taking that course. This poem served to her as an example of the loss of self as knowledge is gained. She intends to graduate in May 2019 with and pursue a career in copywriting; however, she really has no clue.

KIRSTEN HURST is a junior English major at Northern Kentucky University and hopes to eventually become an editor for a publishing house. Her poems have been published in *Loch Norse Magazine* and *The Compass*. Aside from writing, Kirsten has a weakness for coffee, the idea of owning a house, and being invited to things.

RYAN JOHNSON is a sophomore English major with a focus on Creative Writing. He writes for *The Odyssey*, but this is his first real publication. He is fond of reading, *Star Wars*, and most things having to do with the horror genre.

MACKENZIE MANLEY is a junior at NKU currently pursuing a double major in Journalism and English. Originally from Shelbyville, KY, Mackenzie takes her coffee black with a shot of existential angst. Currently the News Editor at *The Northerner*, she spends the majority of her days either writing or thinking about writing.

JAMES O'BANNON is an upcoming graduate from Northern Kentucky University. He is studying English with a focus in Creative Writing. He plans to pursue his MFA at Fresno State University next school year. James enjoys connecting with people through writing. He has been able to establish lifelong friendships through NKU's English department and Creative Writing community. When James isn't writing, he is probably sleeping, eating, or thinking about what to write next. This is his second publication.

KRISTEN PETRONIO is in her third year majoring in Creative Writing. Her minor is in Popular Culture studies. "Getting Rid Of The Poison" is a poem about finding the courage to leave a toxic friendship. Kristen loves to write with a lot of raw emotion. Her goal is to have the emotion in her work connect with her audience in some way. This is her first publication.

BENNY POYNTER is a senior ceramic artist receiving his Bachelor in Fine Arts (BFA) in December 2016. He will also be having his senior BFA show exhibiting a new body of work dealing with endangered species, to conclude his undergraduate career here at NKU.

SAM SIEMER is a junior Creative Writing major. When she isn't reading or writing she is photographing anything that catches her eye. She works in a bookstore that she lovingly refers to as Narnia. Her friends say she belongs in an 80's movie. This is her first ever publication.

KAIT SMITH is seeking her English degree with a focus in Creative Writing. She is a junior this year with plans on pursuing her MFA post graduation. Kait is a part of Sigma Tau Delta and the peer mentorship program within the English department. This is her second publication.

NICK SNIDER is a Junior majoring in English. His work has been previously published in *Loch Ness Magazine*, and has been recently accepted into the *Lamentar Bluegrass* anthology.

NIC VITALE can solve a Rubix Cube in less than two minutes. He will graduate in 2018 with a degree in Creative Writing... hopefully. In the future, he hopes to find peace in the midst of despair, because that is true enlightenment.