

Pulling Grass from the Earth

ERIC BOTTS
Junior Creative Writing Major

From the lawn of the church where you played organ—as a child, pulled forward clumps of grass from the earth, your knuckles flushed—you adopted a stray, her eyes lucent, stealing light from the world. That spring, she gave birth to four kittens—two survived. Summer came. They howled with fleas, drenched your couch in piss. You shrugged it off, so long as you were not home, and hummed non-songs as you prepared for bed. Once, when you were home, your hands moiled into tight little stones.

They shot toward the floor, arms straining, ready to snap from your shoulders. Childlike, you strode to their squalid litter box, pointed, yelled—your face swollen with the color of swollen flea bites that wreathed our sock lines. Then your hands

loosened as you drew them to your chest, shrank into my arms, quietly wishing the cats had died like their siblings. I wasn't supposed to see that. You cried also at their birth. When you called, I pictured them drenched in amniotic fluid,

shivering in your unheated apartment, eyes too large for their heads, desperate to see the world. Only two survived. Later that summer, the nurse at the clinic said I couldn't come with you.

Destruction's not something men are allowed to see

women—great creators of our society—do.

Across from me, the father of a teenage girl—the only other father in the clinic. Deflating

into his collarbone, his chin multiplied.

(The kittens' mother, I'd later learn, did not eat

the placenta, which contains a chemical that makes mammals more nurturing.) When you came out, you were placid, glazed over with anesthetic.

I sometimes think of you—your eyes

like a cat's: sharp, glowing, as light is,

like some unwanted parasite, cast back out.

I think of you wandering the clinic halls,

wonder how you felt under all that anesthetic.

How you felt as it wore off. As you breathed in

and out. As you deflated into my chest.

expletives DELETED

LUKE KUZMISH - *Sophomore*

calming down after
a knee jerk response to a clever church
marquee

rather than read
i memorize ignoring the words
disgusted
by the sound of persuasion
in the voice in my head
cooing "every little thing is fine."

...if it weren't
I would say that thoughts are combusting
but knowledge makes no difference
to the man who
refuses to act on his wisdom's behalf

i shed a single tear
for he who thought the ticking
was anything other than
his own clock.



Erie County Sunrise

LOIS HEISE - *Creative Writing Major*

When you officially get to the point where you can honestly say that nothing is going right...

DESSIA JONES - *Sophomore*

Where do you go? Even the rain refuses to fall on you the way you want it to. You want it to pour. You want to get soaking wet and feel so incredibly bad for yourself... that you feel good. Almost like a slit to the wrist. When you get to the point where you need and crave to feel bad, that one slice will make you believe you're worth it. Even for just a moment. But, the rain won't let you. You can't even do that.

.....You can't feel terrible to feel satisfied.

You hear the thunder in the distance and the lightning is teasing you with its brilliance. But the sky refuses to break. The light drizzle makes you even more frustrated than you thought you ever could be. Where do you go? What do you do? Everybody around you is asleep. Everybody else is high. You're stuck outside in the taunting storm; alone, and insignificant. Nobody wants you and you can't blame them. How could you be a hypocrite when you feel the exact same way that they do? Even though the rainfall isn't good enough for you, there's no way you can reject it. It still holds a more powerful role than you do. The connection you have is far too strong.

To go inside would be a wasted mistake. Materialistic figures would mock every move you made. The silence of the nothingness around every corner would drive you mad. Cheerful people on television would make you sick. It will only bring up ghostly thoughts that you're trying to get away from. The automatic light around the kitchen will make you remember that you're still alive.

.....That is the very last thing we want.

If you sleep, you dream. Dreams aren't even dreams anymore. Every morning you wake up with a new nightmare unfolded right before your eyes. Old memories and new emotions creep up without you having any option. If it was your choice, the sun would actually shine in the short breaks between one nightmare and the next. Visions of death and heartache haunt the day ahead of you. No, you rather stay awake with the silence.

So where do you go when you're not wanted inside, outside, or even in your own mind? People, places, objects, and you yourself are ashamed to even consider your name. Where do you go? When do you leave? What do you think? How do you live? You don't. Take to the darkness. Everyone and everything will forget you even existed. Maybe you finally will too.

.....Don't utter a single word and life will make sense again.

Where to Return

NATHAN CARTER - *Showcase Editor*

He said, "Follow me down to the valley below."

The moonlight crept down our backs and slid over the hillside in a slow roll. It was as if the blades of grass turned an unmistakable grey. I heard the undercurrent hit the bank, roll up and saunter back toward the horizon; the beach was just over the next knoll, a bit of a geographic rarity. As we stepped down the hillside, it seemed that the bottom of the valley became further and further away. I trusted my footfalls to my leader and to the darkness; it was as if the still air, just out of reach of the moonlight, was devouring my feet and legs.

"Watch your step. There're some branches about."

Occasionally my ankles would smack against a rotted twig, each cracking and splintering beneath my weight. The ones with thorns stuck through denim and into skin, and each time, I pulled away. As we continued to descend, the branches became larger until eventually I found myself face first into the mesh of two entangled saplings. Their thorns dug into my chest, stomach, and forehead. I cringed and pushed off of them, taking a few steps to the right and descending further.

"When you see the fire, follow it."

He was right. Just off to our left, an immense light cut through the darkness like a cavern-ridden flare. For a split second, I could see the sea of thorned brambles, and my leader, looking straight at me. He had an annoyed expression, as if I was taking too long, and I could've sworn his eyes weren't the color they were earlier; probably just a trick the dark was playing on me. We began to walk toward the rising flames. Blue orbs began to chase each other through the dancing firelight, laughing at us, at me. I put my hand to my right pocket, then inside it, rolling around the locket you gave me years ago. If I could just see you once more, I would leave this place and go back.

"Go back where?"

To our son's expectations, my father's drunken wit, the space between the bookcase and that old lamp, where I hid when the voices were too much to take.

To the three-foot scratch on my new truck, the shine of your dimples in our last holiday portrait, the collection of knives you just bought from a travelling salesman; he said they wouldn't dull, but they'd never met the burnt skin of that year's turkey.

To the closet of my boss' office where I watched him with the secretary, the look on your face when I told you, how Yuri barked whenever you walked in for the first year; these last years, he sniffed and then licked your face. He still barks when I walk in.

"Welcome to Hell."