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Editor's Note

As August (from the Latin for “hot as a hellhound’s balls”) presses upon us like two Spandex hams on a bicycle seat, we are pleased to offer you a handful of refreshingly cool stories and poems.

Share a glass of lemonade with the “hinky man,” observe “The Banana Festival” from a safe distance, tremble before “Tiny Gods,” and drop a curtsy on the “The Queen of the Moon.”

Read ‘em quick before they melt.

— Laura Garrison

hinky man

Natasha Burge

he was the hinky man
bowlegged and metal-toothed
toenails of a vagabond saint
riptide feral and freaked

we taunted him
we thrilled at him

neighborhood wild man
scuttling out of his house
with the licorice door
and the droop-eye windows
walking higgledy-piggledy
like his legs came out the same hole
and had to bicker each time they
took a step

closer and closer he came toward us
our little table littered with lemons
and cups and napkins and change

he beached himself on our shore
took in our wares
and loosed that grin upon us

lemonade?

a nod

up

down

puppeteer snipped his string

two, please

two?

we stared at that second finger lifted to the sky

clouds spun off the yellow nail bed

the whole earth wobbled on its axis

two cups for the hinky man?

what could he want with two cups?

he was only ever alone

solitude built into the skin of him

loneliness his only virtue

we looked down the street to his house

was that a twitch of curtain in the bug-eyed window?

was there a mrs. higgledy-piggledy?

was there someone to love the hinky man

with his crocodile smile

and driftwood legs?

we gave him two cups

keep the change he said
and turned like a listing ship
and crab walked his way home

NATASHA BURGE divides her time between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain where she and her husband are owned by an unruly herd of rescue animals. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crack the Spine*, *Bitterzoet*, *Luna Station Quarterly*, *Ink in Thirds*, and *Tasa'ol*. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in creative writing and wrestling her first novel into shape.

The Banana Festival

Cecilia Aragon

Liuva's gone crazy. And it's the night Mama's left for the banana festival.

Every year around this time, when the air's thick and soggy than blankets left out overnight in the rain, Mama raises her old gray head and sniffs the air. Her left nostril flares and shrivels. Liuva used to watch her for hours just to catch a glimpse of her extraordinary nose in action.

There's a certain scent the humidity squeezes from the gnarled old peach trees in our orchard at this time of year. Before I was nine I could tell almost to the day when Mama would disappear. She never failed to leave a note: "Gone to the _____ festival."

Each year it was a different fruit, and Liuva and I, when we were still young and foolish, used to wonder what Mama was really doing. We hung out the wash as usual when she was gone, knowing the faded yellow floral sheets, pillowcases, and towels would be even wetter in the morning.

Liuva asked around the wooden clothespin in her mouth, "Where d'you think she's wandered off to this time?"

I shrugged. "Last week she was complaining her feet hurt. Maybe she'll bring us back some new shoes."

"I remember the year she spent days talking about how lazy we were and ought to get the back end of the orchard weeded —"

We shuddered in unison. We both know the back's death for us. Whatever's down there is locked tight only by the cage of tangled weeds.

Liuva went on, "She came back from the mango festival with a load of hoes and rakes and stuff. And what did she do? Throw 'em all down the well. I don't know where she gets the money, but I do know those festivals have never done us any good."

"Then let's just forget about it." And that was that, I thought.

I still keep expecting Liuva to laugh and say it was just another one of her spells, one of those bad times that come upon all of us every now and then. But no, she keeps on chomping away at those peach trees. It's been three hours and she's polished off nine of them. If she keeps going at that rate she'll run out of trees in the weeded area and have to go into the back end. I don't want to be around when that happens.

Mama did say just last night, "You kids are too crazy for me. An old body like me needs some peace before she dies."

What if Mama never comes back, and Liuva eats all the trees? How will I keep the house going? I don't know, but it's getting dark and I think I better hang out the wash. I don't want to tell Liuva that Mama didn't leave a note this time, but I found her hard and cold in the clothes basket we use to store bunches of green bananas.

CECILIA ARAGON's six-word memoir reads: Programmer, pilot, professor, poet: what's next? The daughter of immigrants, she lives in the only city she swore she'd never visit, where she teaches people the beauty of data. Her fiction has appeared in *Cricket Magazine* and the *Purple Aardvark*.

Tiny Gods

Eric Fisher Stone

Bacteria fulfill the mystery
of my flesh. I bequeath myself
to meekest inheritors, to mites
loping like planets through darkness,
gnats glinting star-forged wings, clusters
of toads and slender newts, Junebugs
smashing through the jazzy plum
of the night air, sugar ants creeping
in cupboards, olms blind in black water,
amoebas dripping fingers through
raindrop lakes, millipedes prickling
earth's worm-work, pious crawdads
praying in stock-tank chapels,
microbial angels ticking and gnawing
at the Parthenon's stylobate,
Lascaux Cave, the pyramids of Giza.

ERIC FISHER STONE is a poet from Fort Worth, Texas, where he graduated from Texas Christian University and works at a PetSmart. He is also an incoming graduate student at Iowa State University's MFA in Writing and Environment program. His poems have appeared most recently in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *Zetetic: A Record of Unusual Inquiry*, *Uppagus*, *Third Wednesday*, *Eunoia Review*, *New Mexico Review* and *Turtle Island Quarterly*.

Queen of the Moon

Emery Ross

It's the morning after they decided she was an albatross and Collette can't remember what color Lee's eyes are.

She could draw, with perfect detail, his hands: the shape, the shadows, the precise oval of his nails, the exact length of every single finger. But she absolutely cannot remember the shade of his eyes. This is how she knows it's actual love of the transcendent variety. Something about this makes her realize which animal he is.

"You are a buffalo," she tells Lee later.

"I'm not a goddamn buffalo," he says. "Come with me."

The winter rain stings as he guides her to the parking garage. In the car they are quiet. She drives, he directs her but won't say where they're going. She wants to tell him she can't see very well at night, in the rain, but it seems like a significant weakness.

They arrive at the high desert and the rain stops. She had romanticized what it would actually look like based on his descriptions after he escaped here the week before. It's actually not anything other than a regular desert marked by sagebrush and emptiness, dejected in its regularity. They get out of the car and walk to the edge of the sea of dirt. Fog hangs in angry wisps across the barren landscape.

"Can you see them?" He asks.

She can't, so she says nothing. She hears the faint honking of the geese.

“Over there! See?”

The honking grows louder but she still can't see them.

Collette's eyes start to feel tired from all the looking. She remembers how, when they walked on the winding paths towards coffee shops and garages, the geese regarded them with deference. She understood then that the geese knew everything—they could see past the gap between them and see past the thinly veiled attempts at normalcy and into the deceptions and the wants that existed in those spaces. Now, the geese are right in front of her. She can hear their breathing and the soft chuffs they make. She knows that seeing these geese is of utmost importance, but she's not sure why.

After a while, the desert chill has seeped into her bones. Lee unstiffens beside her, draws her to him. As his chest rises and falls in a pace to match hers, she thinks (not for the first time) how they don't belong here. They are not of this world. Perhaps they belong to the moon, or to one of his galaxies. His arm tightens around her and she knows he heard all of her thoughts. She knows he has the same thoughts. Her sudden intense hatred for the unfairness of it all smothers everything else.

Lee starts to walk away from her, towards the goose sounds. The clouds part and moonlight tries to cut through the fog. He seems to be pushing through something, fighting to take a step. He struggles, then gets free and continues out into the vast, unending desert.

Collette tries to follow but smacks into an invisible barrier that knocks her back. She slips a little on the ice as the honking surrounds her. Indistinguishable creatures scream at her, and she knows what they are saying, they are urging her to *hurry, hurry!* She runs back and forth pounding her fists, jamming her toes against her boots as she kicks and shoves against the wall.

She hammers at the barrier and searches for an opening for hours. The geese take breaks from their screaming and sometimes hiss, but the quiet is unacceptable then, so she calls his name until she grows hoarse. Finally, her frozen hands crack and bleed and she can't move them anymore. She slides down to the cold, hard ground and cries tears that freeze on her cheeks.

"I'm sorry," she says.

A lone goose, head held high, approaches her. She stares at its sleek black neck, the texture of its back. It spreads its wings wide and arcs its neck back for a moment before inching closer and looking into her. She knows those eyes, those kaleidoscope, indeterminate irises. The remainder of the moon's rays escape the fog, illuminating both of them and the shimmering dust beneath.

"You are a goose," she whispers.

EMERY ROSS is a writer and graduate student living in Boise, Idaho.

On the cover:

“Fire Breather”

LAUREN MARX's work combines elements of animal symbolism, biology, mythology, and cosmology into personal mythologies of nature and the Cosmos; she seeks to illustrate how humans attempt to understand the epic intricacies and mysteries of the Universe. She holds a BFA from Webster University and currently resides in St. Louis, Missouri. You can find her work online at laurenmarx.com.

