



RAGWEED

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Editor's Note

By Mikayla Hamilton

It really feels like yesterday I was discovering what *Ragweed* was at all. A senior in high school, browsing Lees-McRae's website, and seeing that the English department had a literary journal! It wasn't even a thought in my mind that I'd be sitting here, writing an editor's note for *Ragweed* my senior year of college.

The community of creatives at Lees-McRae is intoxicating. I'm terrified of the withdrawals I'll withstand when I leave.

This is the biggest issue of *Ragweed* we've had since I've picked up role as editor! I am so proud that we have managed to make something like this. Like the theme suggests, *Ragweed* really is a piece of me, a piece that I am so honored to say is made up of little pieces of everybody else. I can't go one day on this campus without tapping inspiration from someone. All my muses, you (don't) know who you are.

Instead of goodbye, I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to everyone who made this process possible. Matt Wimberly, Makayla Gregory, Maya Jarrell, Dr. Joe Worthen, Giada, Grace, Lydia, Michael, and all the contributors to this issue.

This note is a short and sweet one. Y'all have enough to read in these next pages. Now read on, and enjoy the work of the minds I get to enjoy every day.

FICTION



Stinging Nettle

By Nate Darden

Urtica Dioica

Urtica Dioica is commonly referred to as stinging nettle, common nettle, or burn nettle. This plant originated in Europe, temperate Asia, and western North Africa, but now it grows worldwide. It produces small, green leaves as it grows taller, anywhere from 3 to 7 feet. These leaves are made up of hollow stinging hairs. Trichomes. These are the nettle's needles, a defense.

The beautiful needle does not only stab, it injects, causing both mechanical and biochemical irritation. The smallest break can infect one's skin with itching, burning, and even a rash. Its venom is made of histamine and other chemicals, sending the skin into a frenzy once it has made contact. The irritation can last for a few days, a relatively short amount of time for any real damage to be done.

If you see stinging nettle in your path, it is best to avoid it at all costs.

He was sitting on my bed. He typed furiously as I talked about various novels we read in our general education literature course. The skipped classes and missed assignments seemed to catch up to him as I prepared him for our exam. He muttered something about this being useless, that there was no way for him to learn all of this in one night. He looked over at me with those dark brown eyes, the ones that invited me to dive into them and bathe in their murky waters.

I did not expect the night to end in starved kisses and yearning touches.

A new routine grew out of that night, him coming over to pretend to study and me letting him. I allowed it the second, third, and fourth time. I forced myself to remember that this was nothing more than a fling. There was no true substance in this entanglement. No matter how hard I tried, I could feel myself slipping into a state of delusional bliss. I caught myself wanting more from someone who stayed complacent.

The night he left and never came back, I screamed. Tears ran down my face, tears of rage. I cursed at the stars for shining. I cursed the trees for sprouting leaves. I cursed him for making me feel unworthy.

A Conversation

By Clara Johnson

“Well, that does it,” the doctor sighed softly as the second syringe finally stopped the heartbeat. The poor goose laid on the table with empty eyes and a still body quickly becoming cold. The doctor walked me to the door, the night chilly and clear.

“You can go. Have a good night. Hopefully, tomorrow will have a better ending.”
“I hope so, too. Have a good night,” I reply as I start to walk down the gravel road toward my car. Damn, why couldn’t they try to make more parking spaces instead of having to pray you don’t get robbed or attacked by a bear. Whatever, it didn’t matter right now. All I wanted was to go home and doom scroll to forget the pain of yet another innocent creature being taken away because of human stupidity. All the sudden, I felt a chill run down my spine, every vertebrae seemed to clack against each other; I knew who this was.

“For fuck’s sake, why now? I know you have her so why do you want to talk?”
“Well great to see you, too! Thought I might pop by and say howdy-do.”

When someone imagines looking Death in the eyes they usually imagine a bloody skeleton with a scythe and evil terror, waiting to drag you to Hell or whatever. They got the skeleton and the scythe right, but that’s about it. They forgot to mention the black cloak that he wears, not because he has to, but he finds it quite fashionable. It gives him “exquisite taste” as he says. He’s also rather clean with not a drop of blood in sight, and the scythe is not for harvesting, but rather for protecting souls from demons and other unworldly cryptids.

“How’s she doing?”
“She’s a bit confused but she should be fine. Once we reach the Afterlife, she’ll settle down.” I look down to see the soul of the goose we just euthanized. She barely forms the shape of a goose while on earth, she simply looks like a clump of light particles to the naked eye. If you look long enough, however, you’ll be able to make out more features. I can see her eyes, no longer empty but alive once again with some confusion but no fear. She knows she’s okay. Once they reach the Afterlife, she’ll take the form of a goose once again and will be able to fly once again for all of eternity.

“Hard day?” Death asked, sitting down on a nearby log with the goose immediately trying to sit in his lap.

“Yeah. Was it that obvious?”

“Well, seeing that one of your creatures is now scratching my femurs, trying to sit on me, I think it’s safe to say that you’ve had a rough day.”

“I suppose.”

We sat in silence for a bit, the goose finally getting comfortable enough to settle down. I’m sitting there, eyes slightly narrowed, my tongue between my teeth. I must’ve been talking to myself because after a few moments, Death turns to look at me.

“Bee in your bonnet?”

“That’s the saying you go with? Instead of ‘hey, are you okay’ or ‘is something bothering you?’ you say that? I know you’re Death but come on, you can do better than that.”

“I know. I just miss hearing it. People used to say it all the time, back when, it’s called bringing something back. You should try it.”

“Well, clearly I failed with this goose.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

I chuckle, “I know, I’m just messing with you. But I guess I do have something on my mind. I just don’t understand why people have to be terrible, and why you have to exist, no offense.”

“None taken, being Death I hear far worse insults thrown, but that’s a question that many have asked.”

“So, do you know the answer? Do you know why you exist? Why does death have to happen? Why do you take things away?” I notice my breath catch and hot tears forming in my eyes. The goose tries to lay her head on my lap but simply falls through. Death eventually lays a hand on my thigh, causing a veil of light to appear. With this veil, the goose was able to lay her spectral head in my lap. Death sat silent for a minute before he spoke.

“Truth be told, I don’t know why it was *me* specifically, but I’ve come to love this job.” “How on earth could you possibly love a job like this!? You kill things!”

“Ah, well this is where you’re actually wrong, bucko! I do everything but kill beings! It’s nature itself that perishes, apart from humans, of course.”

“Like the goose,” I reply softly. Death is all-seeing, so I know that he saw the exposed bone. I know he saw the scratches on my comrades arms from her feet. I know he saw the x-ray of the bullet that snapped the bone in half. Now she couldn’t see her living flockmates, or a possible mate. Yes, she would be at peace and happy in the afterlife, but she would not be able to see her living fellows until they too, met Death. Right now, she lay half asleep with her head and neck scrunched up under Death’s chin. Very comfy goose.

“Yes,” Death said softly. “Like the goose.”

We sat in silence for another bit, until I finally spoke up.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that you killed things,” I say.

“Don’t worry about it! I know you were simply upset and misinformed. Besides, like I said earlier, I’ve heard people call me far worse things, right, Goose?” The goose let out a small honk in agreement.

“So... why do you exist?”

Death sighed. “Well; it’s a bit complicated how I came to be. Like I said, it’s nature, be it natural or human, that perishes. I’m a bit like you in a way, we both didn’t ask to be made, yet the divines and stars aligned and wow! Ta-da! Here we are! Also, my job is to work in one with nature. It perishes, and I merely take them to the other side.”

“So are you, like, a god of sorts?”

“Absolutely not in the slightest! I would be terrible at it! Nah, My job is to keep a being calm, protect them from evil, and, if they were evil, I get the pleasure of chucking them down below!

But if not, they simply get a nice little stroll to the Afterlife.” I want to ask. It’s burning in my mind that this question must be answered. I swallow hard and say–

“Can I see? I want to see the Afterlife, I mean.” Death sat still for a minute, thinking. Finally, he says “Sure! If you can do something,” Confused but intrigued, I press. “Ok, what do you want me to do?”

“Grab a stick.” I do so.

“Wonderful! Now take that stick and hold it out,” I hold it out at chest level.

“Now let go and make it float!” I drop my arm and look at Death in exasperation. He doesn’t have lips so he can’t properly smile, but I hear a giggle come from him, the kind of giggle someone does when they know when they’re up to something. The goose lifts her head, the giggling from Death slightly shakes her body. She gives a honk of indignation and then lays back down.

“Something wrong?” Death asks, still giggling. “I can’t make a stick float, I’m a human!” Death sighs. “Okay, Okay. Walk over to the river.” The river he speaks of is only about 10 feet away from where we were first sitting. We both get up to walk to the river, the goose following close behind. We stand by the river, I can tell that the water is freezing without even touching it. If he makes me get in there I’m going to kill him, Death or not.

“Okay, this should be simple. What I want you to do is to take the entire river, and reverse its direction in 30 seconds. Ok, ready? Go!”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I ask in exasperation.

“Ok, tell me why you can’t do these things,”

“I can’t do them because, well, I just can’t! I’m a regular human being with nothing extraordinary about me!”

“Just like you can’t make the stick float, or change the river’s direction, you cannot see the Afterlife until you are ready to travel to it.”

“So I just can’t?”

“Unfortunately, yes. No rhyme or reason, you just can’t as it is simply impossible.” Death slowly crosses back to the log we were first sitting on, the goose once again in his lap. His scythe was propped lazily against a tree, as no cryptid would be stupid enough to sneak up on Death himself. I sit back down and sigh. “I wish that I could save everything. That every being could live their full lives.”

“Sadly, that’s not how nature works. Sometimes, things need to pass. Sometimes, you can do everything and it will still not work. Sometimes; it’s simply best to let me take them. I promise I will love and care for them. They will be at peace and whole again. Please–please just trust me.” With that, Death takes my hands in his. Swirling wisps of light, the same pieces of light that made up the goose, spin and circle around us. They light up the trees, the leaves, the river; and then they begin to form. Not just into meaningless shapes, but into beings that once lived on Earth. I see a group of classy ladies that looked as though they were from the fifties. I see a beautiful woman with a small gray dog. I see a black and white terrier zip by and disappear. Everything seems to be moving around me. I can see each being walk or fly or swim,

or—whatever! I saw an opossum with a new leg, a small bird that looked new and healthy, a green parrot sitting in an apple tree, and so many more that I couldn't even count.

"It's—beautiful. Why is it beautiful?" Death squeezes my hands before pulling me into an embrace.

"Because good beings never truly die. Don't forget it, kid."

"Will I see you again? Before I die, I mean?" I slowly let go, and Death steps back, the goose standing at his feet. She comes up to preen my hand before turning back toward Death.

"Maybe, if I'm in town I'll stop by. Get a snack. Shoot the shit. But just remember, as long as I'm a part of life, I am a part of you, so you'll never be alone. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Well, that does it," The doctor says cheerfully as we were all relieved that everything was finally done. "You can go now, have a good night and I'll see you tomorrow!"

"Alright, I'll see ya!" I respond, a small blue box in my hand. I find a small opening in the forest and slowly open the box a bit. In it, a small screech owl peers back at me. I open the box completely as the owl sits there, unsure of what to do.

"Go on," I say softly. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the owl silently took flight and like a ghost, disappeared soundlessly into the trees. The doctor was right, today was a better day. But just like there would be more days like this, there would also be days like the conversation. As I sit, taking in the busy night of all the creatures stirring, I hear a sound, almost like a triumphant honk of a goose, I look up into the sky and see nothing but the treeline, But something was there. I knew it was. Slowly, I get up to walk back to my car and look up at the sky. Even though the trees could only let me see little of the black night sky, I could somehow tell that it was full of light.

One Less Snake Under The Sea

By Max Geckler

Twenty one thousand leagues under the sea lie all sorts of creatures, bottom feeders, regions, ecosystems and even an entire civilization unseen by human eyes. This civilization doesn't have a name but it's made up of all sorts of intelligent creatures. The sea dwellers resemble humans in many ways. They match human intelligence, emotions, addiction, and violence, especially violence.

Many of the residents eat not just to survive, but because they can, because they want to. These animals are typically referred to as "monsters" and this story starts in an old monster hotspot, the Black Tops Casino. Now even though these are all creatures of the sea, they don't need to breathe through water or even eat that much. They don't adhere to the logic that humans understand, mostly.

Alone at the bar sits Stevie, sporting his classic black suit, black fedora and red tie. Red scales on his hand grip around a half empty cherry slurpee. His eyes begging to be shut, he tries his best to lose sense of everything. He's unable to hear the orchestra of noise flooding the casino with the arrival of two monsters wearing gray suits.

They both place themselves on opposite sides of Stevie while sitting down. The one on the left asks,

"Stevie is that you? I haven't seen you in forever how you been."

A cloud of smoke reaches Stevie's face before his words, this must have been Mister Gojira. But before Stevie could muster a half assed reply the monster on the right spoke up,

"Yea Stevie, it's been so long, how bout a game of cards huh?"

The monotone voice, it was fucking Bruce. Stevie turns his head left and right before standing up and says "Alright."

Three monsters strolling through the casino. Mister Gojira stomps, and Bruce flops while staying mostly parallel to Stevie's slithering. All of them receiving sideways glances from the other casino members, and Stevie noted many of them. A whole table for Poker stared, including a man with small but bright white eyes and a rod dangling from his head. Sporting a bright button shirt covered in tropical plants, Stevie's sharp fangs grinning. This man makes a perfect picture of Parson, Stevie's brother.

Mister Gojira and Bruce lead Stevie up the red stairs and to one of the private rooms which overlooked the casino grounds. The room itself is poorly lit, the only bit of light extending from a light bulb dangling from a lone chain. Under it, a leather couch with Gilly Big Lips, Little Moby Richard, and Nemo, all playing cards on a black table. None of his former coworkers are happy to see him.

A few feet behind the table lie a wooden desk with a chair. Darkness clouded his face, it's the Don, he's the only being whichever peeled oranges like they owe him money.

"Stevieeee! It's been so long since I last seen you, how you been, sit down!"

Stevie coiled his body around a pull up Chair in front of the desk and takes a nice big cherry filled slurp. He places the slurpee down and turns his eyes on the Don before speaking.

"I'm doing okay, how are you?"

The Don uncrosses his pure black hands and exclaims

"Oh great, whatchu been up to since uhhh, well in general."

This fucking prick, he knows, or at least he knows about my brother. Why go through all of this effort to track me, even rent a room? Fuck, they probably think I flipped, not that it matters anymore. Stevie thinks to himself, even though he looks more like one of the bums he would kill. The Don waits for 16 seconds before dropping his orange.

"Alright if that's how you wanna be-" the Don's statement was cut off and so was Stevie's right arm. "SHSHHHHHHH", A spray of red mist erupted like a geyser from his amputated arm, the blood spilling onto the floor and seeping into the slurpee. Stevie hisses and thrashes, wriggling his head and all the way down to his tail. But Stevie feels a rising pressure around his throat. Before turning an eye, he's thrown down against the desk.

He was tangled in tentacles by Nemo while Gilly Big Lips placed a Type 54 semi automatic pistol against his head. Stevie thinks how Gilly looks really stupid, with his ginormous lips, "How could anyone take him seriously?" he thinks for a brief moment before realizing the gravity of his situation.

"Tell us what you've been doing these past few weeks." Demanded the Don.

"I've just been coming here! That's it, I don't even gamble or anything! I didn't even bring my knife, I- I've given up on that life."

The Don nods to someone behind him, Nemo's slimy tentacles start groping his body and all of his pockets. He sees Nemo shake his huge head back at the Don.

"Who said you could go? Just because you go through something you're gonna sink the rest of us with you!"

Stevie kept speechless, there was no way he could answer this. But he still sees the Don and before he moves his skinny black fingers again, Stevie shouts,

"Wait! I'll make a bet with you, we'll play cards and if you win, I'll tell you names, places, faces, everything and more. If I win, I get to slither on out of here."

The Don lets out a little laugh,

"Heh, alright, you good to play without your dominant hand, hehheh."

From the Don's back pocket comes out a heavily worn down deck of cards.

Stevie watches as the Don shuffles the cards, placing them on random parts of the table. They always played this game, Stevie thinks it might have been called "go vertebrata". But It was always Parson who knew how to play. Stevie never needed to play; he just needed to be behind the guy playing Parson. Unfortunately, today wouldn't be that, it could never be "that" again for Stevie after ;losing him.

Gilly takes his gun back and Nemo leans Stevie back into the chair before removing his tentacles. The Don's yellow eyes and black dot pupils only look to Stevie. The red snake realizes he's suppose to play something. He does his best to peak at his deck, two 6s a 3 and a Joker. This

meant nothing to him. He sees the Don also has a deck so he at least knows it wasn't like blackjack.

Stevie places down a card and the Don is the first to laugh, the others joined in after. Stevie feels it again, for the first time in weeks, the bloodlust. He fantasizes how great it would be to kill the Don here, ignoring the obvious consequences because he's screwed anyway. He reaches for his slurpee and takes a sip. Cherry never goes good with your own blood.

Stevie sees a clear reflection of himself on the cup. A card is set with a chuckle from the Don. His contagious laughter seems to infect Stevie as he joins in, adjusting his hat but also loudly drinking from the cup again.

"WUHPSSSH!" Stevie throws the slurpee, it crashes directly onto the Don's face. His tail reaches into his hat and comes out with a knife. Before Gilly could draw his gun,

"KSHSHHHSH!", the lights went out.

"BANG, BANG, BANG, REAAAAAOWOOH," all of these noises stuff the room, and flashes reveal silhouettes of dying and scared monsters. Gojira cries, Bruce is blown to pieces, Gilly continues firing, Nemo flails around like an idiot and the Don cowers under his desk. But there's no Stevie. He's gone, he slithers

Escapade, Max!

By Max Geckler

It's the year 2022, late fall of cross country season. My brothers and I arrive at Wingate University's Pride Park, we look as starving goblins. We speak otherwise, but know it to be true. Our current campaign; less fruitful than the previous, begets us to believe our old victories were mere luck. Our bodies die before our spirits, but the spirits are never too far behind. We will make our last stand here, because it's the last chance. In isolation, each of us pray for a grand race; for us to run 6.20 miles, a little faith is needed.

Within our party exists a man whom's heart beats in determined rhythm while his brain shivers in fear. Joseph Landon Cromer, a man of many stories. No one knows from whence he came and where he'll travel. However treacherous his life was before, he stood now as a runner. By now, he has spent days time contemplating his purpose and how running connected to it. But at this place, in this moment, he beseeks something simpler.

"Aye Max, you wanna go ex-plor-ing? I really need to use the bathroom and there's no way I'm using those DISGUSTANG-ah public toilets." Landon asks me. "Oh-ho-ho..." I think and reply with " Yea let's go find somewhere and then we'll warm up.". So it begins, we trek around enemy tents, speaking in our buffoon-ic code to confuse spies and to keep us sane. We quote lines like "Do you honestly not know who da white deaf is?" and "LITERATURE BADGA " as we pass the horribly fowl waste houses, intended to sate the masses.

Over armies of green blades, we prance. Other teams activate their own plans as we ignore them. While traveling along the ovular arena, we spy a magnificent, hidden in plain sight fortress. The stronghold is crowned with a giant "W", this brown castle looks to be a Wingate temple, housing only their best generalissimos. A perfect place to desecrate with our excrement. We loom as crouching tigers, waiting for witnesses to disperse so that we may pounce, until- A-HAH! "Now Landon, let's go!" I command, we now face still doors.

My steady hand coils with the handle and with a simple twist, the inside reveals her beauty to us. We enter the sacred halls under "W", and we're greeted with an ambience that smells of the slurpee falls in a circular K. It's oh so divine and seeing Landon's smirk, hearing his giggles, I join in as we skip with mischievous glee.

Worlds once hidden now beg us to peak, who are we to deny them? One room holds a flimsy deity's statue, a small tan goblin man, with a scarf which snuggles his neck. We are utterly baffled at this creature's monument. We're standing in front of such an iconic scavenger, a cutout of one a comedic genius, whose performances have spread far across our lands.

“Holy crap! It’s Danny Devito!” I announce to Landon, he cackles with me. We continue forth, to claim a throne. Landon is ahead and he spots it first. Not the sheltered lavatory, but something far more sinister.

“Oh my gahh, Macks come ova here an see dis.” I saunter unto Cromer, feeling none of the diabolism oozing from the hanged wall ornament. As I turn, my curious smile erupts to an open and silent scream, then to a devilish grin. Before my eyes exists a golden framed painting, of an old man-no legend. In fact, I believe it was I who told his Icarus tale to Landon.

The black, empty background is a void drawing me towards the painting’s center. A clear and cutting layer of armor is worn by the man in this picture. His hands intertwined, hinting a playful evil. His blue shirt pierces out of his chest, and his face above it questions us. With one eyebrow raised, we are forced to laugh. Together we snicker a crescendo, to an audience of Kramer, Landon, me and, well just us. For a while, we were the only ones in this world.

Despite remaining a diligent warrior for most of my years, I barely remember this race. Well, I remember a few things about it, little of it to do with actual struggling. I recall my companions, the emotions, the journey. I remember Landon, a fellow soldier who I found meaning with, from many simple excursions and escapades. No matter how dull it sometimes was, it was always our own droll. My victories were found with him and others, never by myself.

POETRY



Baby in the Mountains

By Mercedes Hawks

The valley cushions the river
And I am belly side up
the hot sun sticking to my legs
It will carry me away
but for now, the giggles are deep in our chest
and we will sleep in the tent
and I will pull crawfish out of the lake
with two quick fingers
dawn will come
and the morning deer will eat from my starfish palm
we will jump from the grand rock into the current
and the snakes will go between my toes
We will duck from horsefly bites
but dragonflies will make love
on the adolescent shoulders
I will not come back here
the river will take me somewhere
but in my mind
yes, in my mind
the creek beds are still low,
and I am a forgiving girl

Clementine Of the Thigh

By Mercedes Hawks

I am fearful the fruit will sprout
and blossom deeply within my palms
the scent pumping slightly under the wrist
until it is the blood my heart pumps.

To become beautiful by the rinds of a sweet fruit
we must bleed our candied fluid
then watch as it rolls down the chins of godly entities.

Weathered hands popping our firm skins
(we will fold with little give)
Sunken into and devoured in one motion
sliding down the throats of charming creatures.

Settling in the pits of stomach bile
begging to never be sought again.
And again.

Honey Eyes Sweeten My Tea

By Grace Doss

eyes like the amber in a cavern
trap my soul like a prehistoric insect.
someone finds my love stricken soul
trapped in those eyes,
condemned to an eternity of warmth.
eyes like that dusk in a storm,
the overwhelming winds and hail
pelt my soul,
but i carry on.
a moth attracted to a light
on a porch in the
blistering heat of summer,
drinking those sweet honey colored eyes
in my tea.
laughter bounds through the forest
surrounding my warmth,
a cold blue hue of my eyes
lights that dim forest
until i can find those
terracotta soldier eyes.

Satin Fruit

By Mercedes Hawks

A glassy green slip dress
drapes over my lamp
as the light shimmers in between fibers
I imagine sitting underneath seaweed
in the Baltic Sea
while the sun spins and dives
over the tangles
a kaleidoscope shining on the sea floor
the sleek gowns olive-green hues
pirouette in the sun like algae
I think I will slip into the grass
while no one is watching.

I wonder if there is a 12-step program for addicts like me

By Nate Darden

I cried the first time I loved someone,
that knot in my stomach.
Wings hit the walls.
Legs crawled through my intestines.
My head spun and heart pounded.

My mouth waters with every new fix.
Addiction gnaws, I yearn for their movement.
Terror turned euphoric.
Nothing could match their flight.
No high would be the same.

They should lay eggs on my kidney
and cocoon in my liver.
Their spawn feeding on
my juices and sleeping under my spleen,
tucked from the air.

Yet, they grew celibate in my gut.
Their tickling turned lighter
until they became extinct.
Leaving me to rot.

Tea, Forgotten Sugar

Grace Doss

phantoms floating across the stars
evaporations of dreams
spilling out from the tea pitcher
i've spent many a night
getting fussed at for not refilling.
soft caresses of thunder
leave their mark as the dewy morning.
the pounding of biscuit dough
replaces the summer storms,
once the sun rises in its golden hue
softening the whole world
to forget the stir of the night ahead.
the remote falls into the luckiest hand
replacing the gold with silver
lighting the living room in a sheen
only a memory could be doused in.
two of each remain in the home,
not yet had a chance to escape
silently cowering in-
morning's warm embrace.
something clung to me
that i hadn't quite caught a glimpse of,
my understanding not yet mature.
it stains every memory
with a taste of tea forgotten sugar.
finally time for hymns and god's glory
sullen phantoms, we will meet again.

How Much Blood Does a Human Have?

By Grace Doss

as my eyes lift
to view the scene
unfolding in front of me,
my mind wanders to ask
'how much blood does a human have?'
knees scraping the ground
i don't even realize i'm down
until i'm sat in the blood,
covered in it like baptism.
why was she the holy sheep?
the one who gave her body
for christ to feast upon
to bring us rains and glory?
i can't believe there's still
blood rushing from her neck,
her angelic face not yet cold
her cheeks still glow
with what christ should've known
would have gotten her killed.
my eyes burn unable to peer away,
soon my hands follow
i stroke her glowing face
wiping the blood matted hair
away from her beauty,
the blood still pours out of her.
maybe i will be clean after this
such a holy sacrifice
could wash away the years
of being undesired.
i know why they chose her
and why it wasn't me.
did they kill her for god?
or did they kill her
to kill their unholy desires?

I lay in the impression you left on my bed

By Nate Darden

My mother asked why I never make my bed. Blankets disheveled and pillows falling. “Make it because you would’ve done one good thing today,” Rolling out of bed was enough. Peeling myself from the dream. You and I gorging on men screaming in the street, a lover’s graze, mothers who want their youth. Until we nipped at each other’s ankles. Gnashed our teeth. We ate their thoughts, slurped. Toddlers devouring worms on the playground.

Transfiguration

By Cora Stevens

In my past life, I was a larvae
Unpupated, underdeveloped
Damned in an inching hell
Until death fondly cradled me
My translucent segments loose and dangling
Like a spring stretched beyond repair
By scorched palms

My metamorphosis to humanity took two-hundred years

My eyes formed first, curing in a petri dish
Two proud planets with hundreds of pupils
Two Jupiters with
Ninety moons each
And as god polished my
Diamond spine with his forked tongue
I exhaled earth

All ten of my fingers look just like yours
As they line the barriers between your skin and your tender muscles
Cracking through your fascias and watching nectar leak onto my platter
I devour every morsel as my teeth divide you
Like a sour pomegranate

My bile nurtures the sprouting blooms that your strawberry seeds plant along the
Rugae of my spiral stomach
Beauty is harvested from my organs' flora
And until nothing of you is left
I continue to let it grow

Your teeth greet mine as I swallow them like sugar cubes

Let it grow

And I slip the cut meat of your tongue down my endless throat

Let it grow

After all
You can't reap what you don't sow

Plant a seed
Inside my Earth
Just one way
To know its worth
Celebrate the world's rebirth

We say,
let it grow

I Hadn't Felt Love Before

By Alexis Greene

My baby murders diffidence with sharp lineaments,
ridding of execrations who've vowed to harm me.

With careful homily on the joys of humanity,
he brings out my mortality; fain bless these inner workings.

Without petty animadversions, he is constructed from light rays.

One sunrise someday, I will habituate myself to accepting love this way.

The structure of my bones may for once feel ordinary.

I hadn't known this body a moiety,
clawing for pieces unrevealed to my seeing.

So hungry to be complete.

The budding of crassulacean acid metabolisms
penetrate motionless path as if clockwork.

She may adapt

or die.

HALLOWEEN CONTEST WINNERS



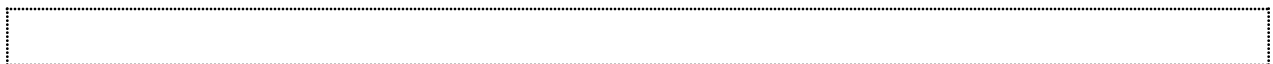
Seven O'clock Man

By Sandryne Camire

“Alright kids, it’s time to go to bed.” Said the father. “Bedtime story please!” The twins yelled. “Okay, fine. What do you girls want? The seven o'clock man or the tale of the headless pony?” “We want the most terrifying one!” The first twin said while attempting to portray a menacing expression. Both giggled and sat down in their chairs. Each child reached for their beloved plush animal and stopped talking. All their attention shifted to their father as he said, “Seven o'clock man it is.”

"Everyone in this town is familiar with the seven o'clock man legend. It is the most famous of all." And so, the father started telling the story of the seven o'clock man. This man has superpowers. He has the ability to shape shift into anything. Every night at 7 o'clock in the evening, he goes from window to window to see if children are sleeping and if they are listening to their parents. He kidnaps kids if he notices them disrespecting their parents or not going to bed by seven o'clock. People in the town claim that he casts sleeping spells on the children when the parents are out of their room. He then opens the window, crouches inside, and drags the youngsters out. Others claim that he adopts the form of the children's mother or father and kidnaps them. Though, nobody really knows what he looks like.

“He may be a teacher or one of your classmates.” Said the father. The twins looked at each other and gasped, as their eyes were watering up. “And the kidnapped children were never to be seen again...” The twins were so afraid that they yelled and cried. Their father reassured them and explained to them that it was just a legend and that not all legends were true. The father tucked them into bed after they had calmed down, kissed them on the forehead, and said good night. "Do you believe what dad just said?" One twin said to the other as the father left the room. “Hmmm. I don’t know. But I know that as long as we’re with dad, nothing will happen to us. We are safe here.” The other responded. Little did they know, the man who had just walked out of their bedroom wasn't who they thought he was.



A Carolina Winter

By Alex Christiana

“Anna! Danny! I’m home!” a cheery woman in worn scrubs called out to her children as she stepped through the front door of the tidy doublewide.

“Hey, mom,” a young, teenage boy muttered as he stepped out of his bedroom, already in his pajamas for the night, to greet Alice.

“Hey, hon’. Where’s your sister?” she asked, dropping her bag at the door and hugging her son with a sigh of relief.

“She hasn’t been home yet.”

“Huh,” she lifted the blinds on a nearby window and looked out onto the street. The fall leaves had all turned brown and the trees lining the asphalt road were bare. The sky was gray and growing darker, but the streetlights weren't on yet, “She’ll be home soon.”

She changed the subject, sensing Danny’s disinterest, “It’s gon’ snow tonight.”

“Yeah,” still apathetic, he paused, “What’s for dinner?”

“Chicken ‘n’ dumplin’s,” she smiled at him. She stepped out into the cold, evening air and tucked her key under the door mat. She stepped back in, flipped the lock, heated their dinner, quickly ate her portion, and went to bed.

The next day, early in the morning she emerged from her bedroom wearing a different set of scrubs with her long, blonde hair tied back into a rushed bun. She grabbed a bruised banana off the counter in the kitchen, leaving the yellow ones for her kids, and crossed over to the front door to pick up her bag where she had placed it the night before. She reached up to the key hooks, but her house key wasn’t there. Slightly annoyed, she dropped her bag and quietly entered her daughter’s bedroom to ask her where she had put the key. As her eyes adjusted to the dark room, she saw Anna was not in her bed.

“That girl knows she supposed to ask ‘fore having a sleepover,” she muttered to herself as she left the house and fetched her key from under the mat. It had snowed quite heavily overnight, but none had stuck to the road.

Once she decided it was a reasonable hour of the morning to call, she used a hospital phone to ring Lynn, Anna’s best friend’s mother. The phone rang for a few seconds and then clicked, “Hello, Lynn, it’s Alice. I’s just callin’ to ask if you could send Anna home a little earlier than normal this mornin’, she has lots of chores to do today.”

“Hey, Alice! Anna wasn’t here last night. Grace is with her grandparents this week.”

“Oh,” a wave of shock crashed through her body, “my mistake.”

“Well, you hav-” she hung up before Lynn could finish speaking. In an instant she became undone and, shaking, approached the nearby police officers having a cup of ER coffee in between emergency calls.

“My daughter is missing.”

The day that ensued was more draining than she ever imagined was possible. Despite the realization of her worst nightmares, she managed to handle it with a fair amount of grace and composure, all with the hopes it would make Anna turn up sooner. But, while Alice was having the longest, hardest day of her life, the neighborhood kids had built a snowman in her yard. Its dark, charcoal eyes and wide, coffee bean smile taunted her. Her resolve failed her, and she let out a primal sob as her fear crushed her heart and pulled at her stomach.

Danny saw the headlights and ran out to the car. Seeing his mother in this state stopped him dead in his tracks. She had never cried in front of him before except the time a CNO from his dad’s Army branch had interrupted Sunday dinner. Gently, he opened the passenger door and sat next to her. He reached out and held her hand closest to him as it was white-knuckle gripping the steering wheel like it was her last connection to reality. He too, began to cry. They sat like this until the tears had washed away the last of their energy. Even though Danny was fourteen, the night after his little sister went missing, he slept in his mother’s bed, holding her hand the entire time.

The next five months trudged along like a dying sled dog. The police and the community helped to try and find Anna for a while, but eventually their efforts dwindled. Alice’s and Danny’s did not. They spent each free moment hanging missing posters, searching the nearby woods, or calling various hospitals. As her search efforts continued to prove futile, Alice started drinking more and more. She couldn’t work as much, no one wants a drunk nurse, so Danny got a job to pick up the slack. He didn’t mind having to take on more responsibility; getting a job, buying groceries, helping to pay bills, and taking care of his mother. He didn’t mind because he believed the more he helped, the sooner Anna would be found, and the sooner Alice would get better.

However, there was still no sign of Anna when the cold, harsh winter finally gave way to spring like a compromised levee. Leaf buds started appearing on the trees, birds started to sing their annual hymns, and the snow started to melt. Midmorning, before his shift, Danny stepped out, into the crisp, fresh spring air. He squinted at the light reflecting off the remaining snow and started towards the car. His eyes adjusted and spared a glance at the snowman who had remained all winter. He snapped back in its direction for a second look.

Something was on top of its thawing head. He took a few steps closer to see what it was. Clumps of matted, dirty blonde hair, the same color as his, sticking out of the icy snow came into focus. Hesitantly, he brushed away more of the snowman's head. When he saw the frozen face encapsulated in the snowman's body, his scream echoed off the surrounding mountains for miles...

“Anna!”