

PAPER CRANE JOURNAL



indulgence

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THE PAPER CRANE

indulgence

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We here at the *Paper Crane* are ecstatic to introduce the first issue of the second volume, featuring once again a disgustingly talented cohort of authors, poets, and artists. In reviewing the work we received over the long spring of 2022, we were quick to notice an especially potent collection of tragic, chaotic, and generally foreboding works that emphasize the strange carelessness of our nature. In this issue, we aim to diagnose the human sickness.

The work in this issue is unafraid to linger in the unknown, travel into the uncomfortable, and confront the unnerving. It does not shy away from ugliness, nor does it attempt to beautify it. We hope that as the summer draws to a close and the second volume of the *Paper Crane* unfolds, these fifteen contributors inspire you to do the same.

-The Editors



A BEAUTIFUL SHADE OF GREEN

PROSE

Claire Fox



We won't get into all the reasons why I'm in the desert, in medias res geographically. What you need to know is that I'm here, and it's a long story. It's mostly because people are weird, and cool things happen when you don't follow the rules of life.

And I know what they say about vans, but this is a minivan. It's different.

"What's your name?" Minivan Lady Ruth said.

"Aila," I said.

Ruth speaks for herself and her buddies Donna and Hal. They like meeting new people and they have a hitch for my car and I can ride with them as long as I want. I'm pretty sure that only happens in movies, but I'm not following the rules anymore, so I figure it checks out. I said I was going to Vegas, and they said they could go through there.

We end up stopping somewhere in the California desert at what is indisputably the Ogygia of dry land.

"Damn," Europa said when I mentioned that. "That's such a cool name. I've been calling it Mirage." She started calling it Ogygia after I arrived. I stayed, and Ruth et al. moved on.

Getting there made no sense. The road is flat, straight, and extends for miles, but somehow a certain 100 feet of it are particularly congested while the next 150 are smooth sailing.

That's just upsetting.

I like order. I eat the same thing for breakfast every morning. Chronological order, though—you don't even remember things in chronological order, you remember them by significance. That one's a sham.

Ruth asked me where I got my vocabulary, and I told her I got it from people, the same place she did. She said she got hers from a book, and I said yeah, that's the same thing. I dropped out of high school and ran away from home, but I still know words.

We stop at Ogygia because Donna needs to pee.

"Strange," Donna said. "I can't find that thing up there on the map. It's just blank."

"Isn't there a prison around here?" Ruth said. "This could be it."

"Jesus," Hal muttered, from the back seat.

"Prisons have bathrooms," Donna said.

The boy who takes our excuses at the gate looks just as confused about us being here as we are. It's probably unfair of me to call him a boy, since he looks seventeen like me and I would slap anyone under the age of sixty who dared to call me a girl instead of at least a young woman, but I don't really care.

And then Ruth has to ask his name, because it's not enough to just chat him up about the weather and the location and how he found himself working for this fine establishment.

His name is Van.

“Are you serious?” I ask.

Van gets on his phone right after we drive away, which I find suspect. Turns out he was calling Europa, who meets us down the road, and Chris, too, and with him comes Benny.

The first time Benny and I kiss, his hands never move. They start with one on each hip and stay there, like he knows how much I like being secure.

The kind of security I need usually requires force, like bracing a foot against the back of the passenger seat so that my spine is flush with the back of my own. Otherwise I feel loose, like someone could come along and metaphorically blow my existence down. Like when Ginny arrives at Ogygia.

“This was a mistake,” I say, watching Ginny walk towards us.

“Why?” Benny asks.

“It’s like, here’s a walking example of your life goals in action, notice how you don’t at all match that—”

Then I shut up, because she's so close now.

"Hi, JoJo. I've been waiting for you to call."

Ginny says that to me, right there in front of Benny.

Benny gives me a funny look. Benny thinks my name is Aila.

Oops.

Seven years ago, I ran away for the first time on a Tuesday at 6:00 pm on the dot. 6:00 pm on the dot is a good time to run away because we eat dinner at 6:15 pm, so Mom and Dad are in their offices waiting silently for the other to volunteer to dig something out of the freezer. The day isn't over yet, so no one has moved the cars in or locked up the house. No alarm.

I met Ginny at the sandwich place next to the fountain in front of the movie theater the next day. She and her friends were eating ice cream outside; it occurred to me that their college wouldn't be on remotely the same schedule as my junior high.

"Excuse me," she'd said. She appeared beside me at the door, alone. "Are you okay? Do you want me to call your parents?"

"Obviously not," I'd said.

She smiled. "That's what I thought. I haven't told anyone

yet. I wanted to come talk to you first.”

I suspect her friends never knew. I think she saw me, made the connection, and chose to turn back and follow me instead of marching ahead like she didn’t notice. Without asking anyone else’s advice, because she didn’t want to be talked out of it. Because Rule #1 is to keep marching.

Years ago, at school, I saw one kid—I’ll call him Red, since that’s what he was wearing—with his arm around another’s neck. I’ll call him Blue. My friends seemed to find this interesting. One of them was even laughing, saying something about betrayal, since she assumed they were friends. Like she was watching a goddamn skit. Red said something inaudible in Blue’s ear, and then some cash landed on the sidewalk and Red released him to grab it and they parted ways. I watched Blue walk the rest of the way to the entrance gate, away from us, out of the corner of my eye as I tried to get the whole story out of them. I told myself I shouldn’t go after him until I knew exactly what had happened, since I didn’t see all of it. My friends must have seen some important part of the exchange that I didn’t that made them decide to not go after him themselves. Otherwise they would be moving. But it turns out I hadn’t seen much less than them. And by that point it was too late.

That was upsetting. I spent the entire day thinking about Blue. It’s easier than you think to spend all day thinking about something. Everything else just takes a step back, and that thing doesn’t, so you keep tripping over it. I reported what I s-

-aw to the Dean after school, once my friends had all gone home. None of them ever knew.

I should have turned back. I shouldn't have even looked at anyone for approval.

I tried to tell another friend about it, one who didn't see, and I got partway through describing Red's arm around Blue's neck when he stopped me by asking "Why does this matter?"

Why the fuck does it matter, indeed? No, it's just that I quite possibly witnessed a mugging, or at least some sort of unhappy confrontation, and neither I nor anyone else did anything. I don't like knowing that about myself, or my friends, or Red. That haunts me.

"I needed everyone to shut up. Everyone's always telling me how to think and feel and what's right and what's not. For once, I wanted to come up with my own opinion before letting someone else tell me theirs, because once they do I can't forget it."

That's what I told Ginny when she asked why I ran away. She told me that was really smart, actually. To make sure I'm not basing everything I think and feel on what others do. When I carry that sticky note around, I carry around that compliment, too. "You're not always wrong just because you're young," she said. "They think they're doing you a favor by giving you their advice, but yours is good too."

I knew I had to love Benny when I first saw him cry. I thought, thank God, here's someone the people who follow the rules would whisper about "being sensitive," like they do about me. I thought, here's someone who would go running back with me. Never before had I considered picking people who would give me good advice. I've always just avoided people so that I don't have to take advice.

Europa is a psychologist and a writer. She runs classes for high school and college students here, because she's rich and can do whatever she wants. She thinks rearranging people like puzzle pieces, putting them in different groups and exposing them to different people, is the way to go, because then everyone gets and gives different advice.

In the barracks, where her small army of children stay—apparently she and Chris have two grandchildren, Aura and Bea, but she's collecting volunteers because she has big plans—I sleep in the top bunk and Benny sleeps in the top bunk of his, six feet away. They feel like how I imagine summer camp does. Lots of kids in a big room. The sound of their breathing.

I scrunch myself up into a ball and pull out a sticky note and stare at it. I have the number on it memorized, but I still keep the folded paper with me, in my pocket, all the time.

From his bunk, Benny sees me staring and signs at me.
"What are you looking at?"

I squint at him. He repeats it slower.

“Number,” I sign back, spelling it out.

“Who’s?”

I don’t know how to sign that.

“Friend,” is what I end up going with.

“Why?”

That’s nice. I’m sure he could have made that question longer, but he knew I wouldn’t get the whole thing anyway.

I felt very scammed when Benny explained that he uses sign language because a family friend of his is deaf, but also because sometimes his twin, Becka, doesn’t speak for indefinite periods. Like, she just goes nonverbal. And I thought, why can’t I do that?

This is hair sticks all over again. I wanted to start wearing them, but I had already been established as someone who didn’t wear hair sticks. I felt like I couldn’t just start wearing hair sticks one day, because that didn’t make sense with my personality as everyone else saw it.

It’s easier than you think to start hating people for knowing you. Knowing you means they want you to stay that way, because they want to be right about you, and everything they assume about you is based on what they’ve already experienced of you.

Becka wants to be an astronaut. Benny isn't sure if leaving humanity behind is just a sweet bonus or if it's her main goal. People accept that Becka is like this. Maybe if I were a different person, I could be that way, too.

The first time I lied about my name was to Ginny. She thinks it's Jolene.

When Ginny gave me her number, I didn't put it in my phone because I liked carrying it around in my pocket. I felt like it belonged to me then, like how we say "my friend" or "my mom."

A few months in, I panicked. I told Europa I didn't belong at her desert compound. I'm not her grandchild, or her friend, or her employee. I've never even met Aura or Bea or Hugo, Aura's boyfriend, whom everyone else here talks about. They say Hugo's a brilliant musician and he'll be famous and they'll get to tell everyone they knew him when, but I don't know him when. I showed up completely coincidentally, because the old lady I hitchhiked with had to pee, and she thought it was a prison.

"Aila, I know all that. Nothing has changed. You belong here," she said.

"No," I said. I was getting itchy.

"Do you want to be here?" she asked.

"What," I said, after a minute.

"I don't care if you're an alien who dropped out of the sky on accident and just happened to land here. No one is meant to be anywhere. They're just where they are because they chose to be there. Choose the place and make yourself belong there."

You look at this place and think there can't possibly be life here, so removed from everything else. But there is. Plants everywhere.

You look at the plants and think, I breathe because of this thing. This thing is defensive green, dull and functional. That is a beautiful shade of green. You arrive in a new place and that green is the first thing you look for, that color that helps you breathe. It will keep doing that regardless of the dumb rules you come up with.

My parents chose Vegas as our meeting place. People are supposed to have parties on their 18th birthdays, and Vegas is where people go to party. I imagine my mom saying I can't meet them in a Vegas hotel looking common, and I imagine my dad jumping at the opportunity to spoil me. I bet he presented his choices one by one as she shook her head and shook her head until she nodded.

The dress they leave for me is green.

My parents wouldn't let me be an emancipated minor when I asked two years ago. They said we'd talk again when I became an adult. So I've been staring at Ginny's number, wondering if there's some legal implications I don't understand. She should

be out of law school by now.

“Jealous,” I signed when Benny asked me why I didn’t call her.

“You or her?”

I give up. I get out my phone and let the screen light up my face like a flashlight while telling scary stories and I text him, “I’m jealous of her. She’s older and smarter and secure. We met a long time ago and haven’t talked since. Why would I call her?”

“Why would you stare at her phone number if you don’t have a reason?” he texts back.

“Shut up,” I text.

“Mouth closed,” he signs, giving me a little smile and a look, like, *what do you mean shut up?*

Hmphf.

“Something she said.” I send this first so that I can spend a minute typing the next bit. “I told her I ran away because I wanted space and quiet to form my own ideas. Because everyone’s too loud and angry. She said that was smart, because we all need to protect ourselves as well as each other. She said everyone says how noble it is to protect other people, but that protecting yourself counts too. I said I wanted to learn to protect myself first. She said she’s a criminology maj-

-or. She said people get angry as a response to a threat, so everyone who's angry is actually feeling threatened, and what does that say about our ability to make each other feel safe, if everyone feels threatened? She wants to do a job that makes people feel safe, that protects people. And I said that was smart. And she said she would protect me. She would make me feel safe. She gave me her number and told me to call her if I ever needed help. I kept it."

It was so entirely against the rules. Strangers don't protect strangers.

If she meant it, I got very, very lucky. I found someone who exists outside of the rules.

"But it's been seven years. What if she didn't mean it? What if I call her and I'm just bothering her because people know that you don't just promise to protect a stranger?"

Benny stares at me. "What if," he signs slowly, "she remembers, and she meant it, and she's been waiting for seven years for you to need her so that she has someone to protect?"

I called Ginny.

I messed up. I called Ginny and I did what she said I should do and then I worried that I was only doing what Benny and Ginny said I should do, so I packed up my things and left a note on my bunk and I checked in at our hotel in Vegas and the first thing my dad said when he saw me was my name, Waverly.

I passed through the casino to meet them, where two pianists were performing dueling pianos. I stood in the doorway facing them. I wanted to turn around and go tell that one performer he was a really beautiful musician. My parents said I couldn't stop time whenever I wanted to do something else. I said I could when it's my timeline.

I ask the performer's name, because a voice that sounds like Ruth tells me to.

His name is Hugo.

Hugo and I found Ogygia again. He was on his way for a visit, anyway.

I went back and talked until Benny forgave me, which wasn't long.

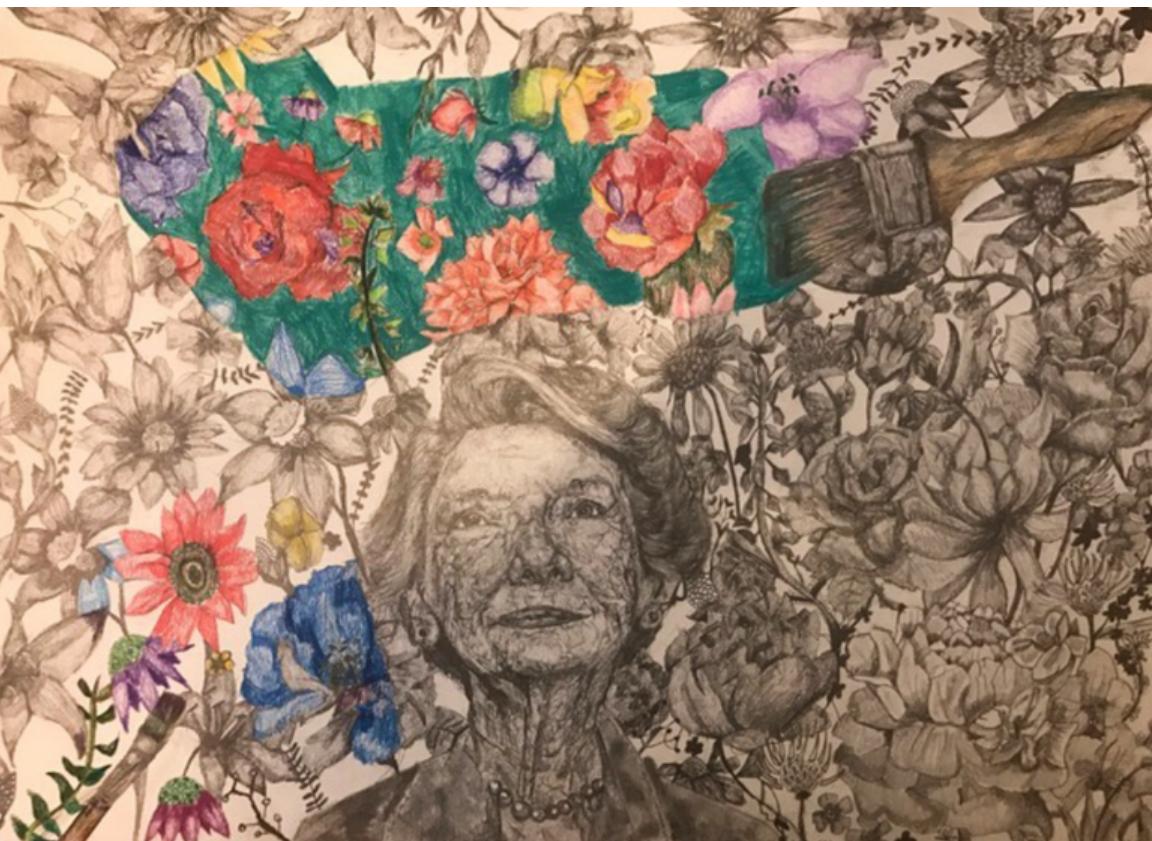
I went back and found Ginny right where she said she would be.

I went back and told Europa she was right, I did want to be there, in some random place just because I wanted to be, where people do whatever they want because rules are a sham.

When Hugo asked my name, I told him Aila. I picked that one and made it mine.

Second person is such an easily misinterpreted point of view. I never assume the "you" I'm reading about is me, me. I assume it's someone else who the speaker is more likely referring to.

-ing to, and I just have the privilege to watch. But I'm talking to you, you. It's easier than you think to keep marching. But if you ever want to turn back, you should. If there's no one around to give you that advice, I'll be that voice in your head.



WAITING

Arushi Katyal

"I made "Waiting" after seeing the painting "The Persistence of Memory" by Pablo Picasso. I saw the way the clocks were flung and stretched around a barren landscape, and loved the way the concept of time was portrayed like that. I wondered if I could portray time without clocks at all. "Waiting" is an image of an elderly woman standing underneath a paintbrush that is coloring the graphite wall behind her. She is waiting for the color to touch her.

‘O
KALEILEHUAMA-
KAMAE KO‘O
‘INOA
PROSE
Naomi Carr

As summer exhaled her first breath of heat and drought, a placeless girl boarded a one-way plane to Kaua‘i. While her mother and father lay asleep at home, she wriggled herself free from California’s safe hands and watched her world dwindle, diminish, and dwindle still beneath her feet. This girl would never be seen again.

At dawn, she washed up on Kaua‘i’s red shore, bathed in the sunlight of a new day in a new place. Perhaps Kaua‘i had thought her a mere tourist, perhaps Kaua‘i had resigned herself as a cultureless island for cultureless people like this cultureless girl, or perhaps her ticket of entry was her kumu hula and hula sisters who had traveled alongside her. Nonetheless, by this island’s benevolence or otherwise, Kaua‘i wrapped her arms around this wahine of a mere fourteen and held the lost child in her embrace for seven days.

As the day, once young and innocent, bled into nightfall, she watched the moon ascend to her throne from the window of a Princeville house. Yet even without ka mahina shining down, she could read the time of day with her eyes closed. The voice of a Hawaiian night is unlike any other. The rattling of insects harmonized with the friendly laughter of neighbors and distant music, all breathing mana into the humid atmosphere of kindness and nā pua, all breathing mana into this placeless girl. Her kumu of ten years breaks the rhythm of this nighttime mele, asking the girl to join her in the living room.

Humbly kneeling upon the carpet, this girl looked like a keiki learning her first mele, learning how to move, learning

how to be. But this girl is no keiki, and to remind her, her kumu bestowed upon her the most treasured gift of all—a name. For a decade, stories of names—of kings and queens, of gods and nature—flowed through her like rain down the pali; now, she had a name to call her own, a name with its own story. Those sacred syllables, handcrafted over ten years, danced out of her kumu’s mouth and fell, fell, fell, upon eager ears:

Ka—The. The origin of a sentence, an oli, a language. The mere monosyllabic beginning of something grander—look ahead, something important is coming. Look ahead, this girl is important.

Lei—a garland of more than just flowers. Love, devotion, friendship, family carefully woven together by hand to be worn around the neck, close to the heart. This girl is the meticulous patchwork of those who love her and of those whom she loves. This girl carries the spirit of Aloha. This girl is to be cherished, to be kept close to the heart.

Lehua—stubborn, steadfast, yet sensitive—life sinking down roots into the dark desolation of dried lava, where nothing else can flourish, grow, or even dare to breathe. Unashamed of her bright red hue, the lehua flower anchors herself to the earth against all odds, as if to say Look at me. I am alive, like a dandelion in concrete, only more beautiful, more sacred. This girl is the lehua in the lava, an interloper fighting to survive where she does not belong. And somehow, she has put down roots into the ancient art of hula, into the Hawaiian culture, the language, and begs the island to let her stay.

Makamae—Precious One. After all, isn't there something precious in beating the odds? Isn't there something beautiful about losing yourself in something that you are not, about becoming what you were never meant to be? Isn't there something beautiful about finding a home country when a home country never existed for you, even if it only lasts a week's time?

Kaleilehuamakamae. I tread carefully at first, with that same contemplative tenderness I used to take my first kaholo at four years old, that same contemplative tenderness I used to drum my first ipu at twelve. The pronunciation rolls off my tongue, but I'm cautious; I know I was not born here, but perhaps I was reborn here. I do not claim this stolen land, I do not call myself what I am not, yet I let the culture live in my feet, in my hands, in my hair, in my voice. I let the culture live in the stories I fight to keep alive. As long as my knees bend and my feet carry me, as long as my hands remember the stories, as long as my voice can chant, no matter how quiet, this culture will live within me.

Somewhere on that island, there is a girl who has lost herself in another's culture, who has found her long-lost pulse in the drum of an ipu. Perhaps she still watches ka mahina rise and reign over the night sky. Perhaps she still dances for Pele at the foot of the Kilauea lighthouse. Perhaps she is still braiding her lei po'o, surrounded by her hula sisters, all reborn with different names. Perhaps she wanders the forest in solitude, whispering her new name to herself until it joins Hawai'i's nighttime mele, until she becomes one with Hawai'i.

Translation Guide (in chronological order as they appear)

1. ‘O Kaleilehuamakamae ko ‘o ‘ino = Kaleilehuamakamae is my name
2. kumu (n.): (hula) teacher.
3. hula sisters (n.): the girls I dance hula with
4. wahine (n.): woman
5. ka mahina (n.): the moon
6. mana (n.): sacred power; life, energy
7. nā pua (n.): the flowers
8. mele (n.): song
9. keiki (n.): child
10. pali (n.): cliff
11. ka (determiner): the
12. oli (n.): chant
13. lei (n.): garland
 - a. lei po ‘o (n.): lei worn around the head
14. makamae (adj.): my precious one
15. kaholo (n.): a basic hula motion
16. ipu (n.): a drum made from a hollow guard used in hula
17. Pele (n.): Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes



HOW TO GET HIGH ON LIFE, A VISUAL POEM
Lauren Theiler

PURGATORY
CHAPEL

PROSE

Mikey Harper

i think i'll wake up in a playhouse.

i think i'll be curled up on a dirt-crusted plastic floor, like how a fetus curls into the womb of its mother. born again.

the canals of my teeth will not host anything that writhes, my skin will not be puckering and loosening and twisting up in the hands of time – *corpse* is not the right word.

my hair will not slide down smooth shoulders tossed in white, nothing will refract differently behind my eyes – *angel* does not quite fit.

i'll be a boy in a playhouse in a field in the sun in a place where the wind hits notes i have never heard, dead regardless.

maybe the playhouse is a church, in a pasture in texas, maybe i am curled up in the spot where i didn't think twice before i kissed the cheek of my grandmother's corpse. i was little then. i felt love in ways that the concept of oddity could not touch, not if i didn't understand how any display of love was odd. in that moment, she was just my grandmother; in this moment, i am kissing my own cheek.

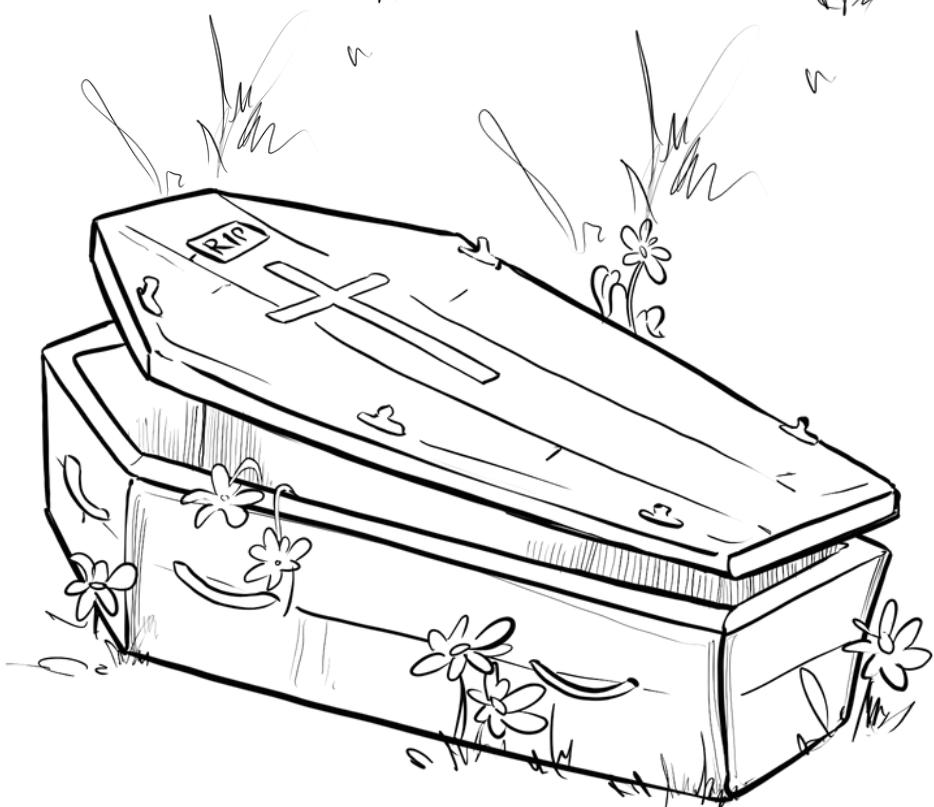
i could almost reach out and ball her dress in my fist, like if i tried hard enough i could run my hands through the fields of blue flowers sewn on the hem. i could dance through them, let the little blades of grass reach up and hug the warmth between my toes. her hair spills off her scalp, veins of orange reaching down to taunt and brush the skin on my face. so blue, blue beside them. they tease me with their life.

rude little girl, i think. who wears such a colorful garment to a funeral?

rude little girl, i think. this goodbye is not hers to say.

i have looked upon her a million times, scowled in mirrors at the crooked points of her teeth and the color of her freckles. unplanted seeds set in chubby cheeks, she'll spend forever asking, *when will they grow?*

she is tired of kissing herself goodbye. her mary jane shoes click their tongues all the way up the aisle, singing disapproval in every pew.



I'M YOURS
POEM

Vivian Huang

the man in white is crying against
his scarlet sheets, made from wrinkled,
trembling fingers, interlocked palms white knuckles
grip knives from the window

as he calls out, down from the daggers
that pierce his throat, in a hoarse voice—

Give me a kiss, / baby. / I love your eyes.

lipstick stains pale skin, explodes
like scorching lava, like the

fleeing laughs that escape
glistening red lips.

baby, / please. / I want you.

wicked smiles creep on
cold cheeks, bruise fragile

wrists made of glass tempered
with shrewd looks, heated lust, &

the man in white whispers—

You're mine, / baby. / (she's his.)

whimpers escape as stiff toes
entangle beneath cotton sheets

tears like wool, shattered windows fog,
cry as they fall to snow.

I'm yours.

SOMETIMES I DON'T
KNOW WHAT TO DO

POEM

Natasha Bredle

a metaphor, but not a metaphor. must i be relevant to you?

my mother called and sounded distant. she was
perhaps three miles away.

i picked a dead flower off the driveway this morning,
and it reminded me of atrocity. of

the days i spend lying in bed, wondering
if my matte walls are the purest thing

i'll ever see. windshield wipers, desperately
trying to de-fog glass

that's supposed to be clear. like my eyes
aren't supposed to see red,

this often. a mirage of flowers beneath me.
please tell me this is real.

comfort. like the autumn leaves
dying beautifully. that dead flower on the driveway,

i dug its grave and could hear the ground weeping.
i pressed my hand to the earth, and its heartbeat

was silent in mourning. we have that in common, at least
i know i am not alone. traffic lights turn

like days passing, and some things change
but some things stay the same. the earth is sad and i am sad.

the earth is happy and i am happy.
i am not one season but many. movement but also
stillness.

SISTER'S
ABECEDARIAN
POEM
Hilary Tam

A sister should take her sibling in her hands and feed it like a flourishing
Bonsai, not cloak her in the sawdust of fallen
Cities. I try to scream
Don't leave but the eight letters stick like birdsong to hollow throats, an
Elegy for nonage. When we
Folded stardust into paper cranes to see who could throw their dreams the farthest,
mine
Guzzled earth the moment it recognized freedom. What do you know of
Hunger? Maybe where you're headed language isn't running ink on your tongue. Lost
Intimacies. I wish a streetscape without you didn't crumble, that home didn't taste like
Jealousy. We'll look through the fragmented
Kaleidoscopes of girlhood, memories unfurled and alien. Frigid
Lamplight. Are you excited?
Maybe in foreign land twilight lingers golden and sisters don't wilt tawny with
Neglect. I'll bury undelivered letters in our childhood toys, look through
Opaque windows for an answer. Stay here with me.
Please. We'll run back to the July seaside and let the sea salt bury
Quixotic fantasies.
Roll breeze and silt on our teeth. Be
Seven again with only each other in our palms. How to sit at the dinner table
Talking to a chair and a fading shadow. Resentment
Unfurling like broken limbs. Shattered girl mistaking aspiration for
Vanity, departure for abandonment.
Why do you have to go? Tell me how to
Xerox grief, endure deserted
Yuletides and afternoon static. Tuck secrets under my lips, forever untold.
Zeal to smile without a sister.

SMOKE SIGNALS

POEM

Hilary Tam

Inspired by / with words by Phoebe Bridgers

Here we've laid our fragmented
 dreams bare on the sand,
Glass shards refracting
 light. Our youths are sizzling on the shore, evaporating in
 sun-fire.

 Tomorrow it will rain back down on us,
macabre rivulets of adolescence hot and desperate on parched
 Tongues.

 Did you read
the inferno? I've traced syllables in the smog, scorched the
 summer air to tell you
 How much it hurts.

Smoke signals dissolving
 in hissing elegies, not yet warming
 your lips. We put all the stars to death in the name of
chance, the grey tendrils of possibility that maybe we are
 unbroken.

Soot smearing your cheekbones, a million unspoken sins suffocating
 the cicadas.

 See,
how our fantasies are burning at the altar.

 A cremation of your irises that cradled the moon
in twin luminescences, eclipsing our song that unfurled
 on the channel 4 radio.

You're trampling the flames into shit and
 Sawdust like you've already given up salvation
and charred our prayers into a dirge.

 These memories are bleeding
 Ash,

Vapour shielding our lungs from coal-blotted hearts.

The future's unwritten and the past is a corridor.

All that braids our souls into one is this sacrifice,
 this orange-grey that blackens our veins.

We cage ourselves in the intangibility of our pain. Fold maledictions into fading fog
 for an answer—

I'll never know if this smoke can last till tomorrow
 But shattered girls will blaze like conflagrations,
Spelling out agony in the July heat like
 Fallen
 stardust.

SURVIVOR'S GUILT

POEM

Kate Rowberry

the amber bottle was in your easy hand
and the liquid was stinging the back of your callow throat.
open the door, *chauffeur*, and introduce
the passengers to the leather upholstery and the gas pedal.
cramped companions. claustrophobia on the emptiest night.
your seatbelt hangs from the silver crook of the waning moon
because sunshine beams from your headlights. the world
revolves around you. chases your sinuous tire tracks.

arrives at the fuddled scene. surround-sound screams.
a lurid collision and rollercoaster lurches. this is not a theme park?
you sag out the driver's-side door. mind fissured.
blanching face. wind tugs at your unbuttoned blue flannel.
atom by atom, you materialize in a slanted reality.
you condense into a timorous entity, a violin voice on the phone.

nine. one. one. what's your emergency?
your grisly words shudder at themselves as they
exit the comfort of your mouth and crawl
into the dispatcher's conscience. prod at the backseat bodies.
invent a pulse and smudge off the red
and inhale the adrenaline. inebriated trance. toes throbbing
from kicking the electric pole that decelerated the vehicle.
barely upright. it tilts to the left but still points to heaven.

the gilded badges spill out of a whining patrol car.
they have you remote-controlled and they gouge
their notebooks with sobriety as they
pluck a story from your tangled answers.
follow the white line. yes, the one in the center.

a dissociation between the painted white
fading from the street and the sharp angles of
the glass polygons that burst from your window.
you wobble along the road marking until you
hit the courtroom wall wearing orange and handcuffs.
someone else chauffeured your friends to the morgue.

ACCLIMATION

POEM

Nicol Milev



(cw: alluded death)

I promised you that I wouldn't tell anyone
about the night you almost froze on the mountain

you were certain the wolf would find you asleep on the snow
sleet had soaked through your last pair of shoes

and you had imagined the slippers your mother had sewn
the ones you wear now even when they're worn whole

you had imagined the photograph she had shown your friends, the one where
you and your brother were young and bare in the woods

the sweet scent of wild blueberries that had stained your fingers
the bitter pine-needle tea your father brewed, some simple consolations

that might keep you warm through the night
I've never been much of a mountaineer myself, my many memories

of climbing are cursed with cousins teasing the flush across my cheeks
my eagerness to ascend

but now I swell my lungs and puff
my chest, ignore the ache of my legs

I leave myself, imagine my corpse lying in the snow
a cerebral vision, one that you'd blink at

and it would disappear, a temporary psychosis
that will dissipate like a morning dream

there is nothing much to hold onto here
except for the memories that aren't yours and regrets

in case I stumble, I keep my eye on this path
that only gods could've worn into the earth and

hope you'll hear me if I fall and look back
at me, instead of always ahead

that you'll let our peak escape, let it wander
even for just a little while

I'd call your name
but I fear you wouldn't respond

I'd wonder if you've forgotten I'm here climbing behind you
if you still dream of me climbing beside you.



WHAT LIES AT THE END

saesame



Saε-

CANCER

POEM

Ziyi Yan

something blackens inside.
maybe it is stomach acid, after blanching my tongue
in bitter chocolate. i am scared something will shatter
if i smack my lips.

mom clings to the landline phone, ripped from the stand.
the screen pulses orange. somewhere across the world there are hands
who worship this same heartbeat–
there are fingers that must hold a face, but
i can only picture limbs
splayed like arteries, singed, sewn shut.

i cling to my sister and her limbs are crushable.
maybe this is as good as love gets–
it doesn't eat organ after organ and punch through the flesh
like that other thing.

my sister squirms and tells me to get off.
my dad makes another wire transfer, says it's the way of the world.
i carry my own body instead, slip upstairs. i know
the goddamn world, i
lie on the floor
and make friends with my nail clippings,
snap them in half like all the words i didn't write–
callus, branches, hold–

i stare at the hospital-white ceiling
and it might be the last thing i see
too.

someone told me you can't write well about anything
until it's dead to you.
and i can't decide
if i've written this well enough.

END OF DAYS

POEM

Nickolas Vaccaro

Worms dug deeper of late,
More sincerely,
Nearer to Tartarus;
Birds did not sing of the fox's invasion;
Prophets no more declaimed;
Surfeiting kings roused from children's sleep;
Priests forgave all in line for confession;
Mothers forgave their sons;
Voiceless Mother,
Wingless Mother,
Forgive me.

ELEGY FOR BIG JOHN
POEM
William Bittner

for a \$7,000,000 triceratops

Poor Big John. Frills oozing in the dirt, and no penicillin for 66 million years. It happens to the best of us, that tale as old as time: a pretty girl (nice horns, big beak) caught your leaf-filled eyes, but you weren't the only one who saw her. Love doesn't take half measures, and now you're slightly less complete. The bastard punched right through, horns-on-armor, because you were just too big, just too blessed to have everything. In your last moments, infection in command, did you regret it? Surely a lot of love could fit in that five-foot head, enough to launch your lovely lady off a seesaw so she can take you in all at once, eyes to thagomizer. I bet the love stayed in when the new alpha broke skin; stuff like that heals. Except, it didn't. Candy hearts pooled in that five-foot petri dish, and something old and odious got in, got fat. In your last moments, is it any comfort that you're worth more in death than you were in life? You got a price tag: they paid for you what we paid for Alaska. But that might not mean much, you scaly South Dakotan. I think you're alone; we never found the triceratops that got away.

OBLATE SPHEROID

POEM

Marion Hawthorne

I walked around and around the kitchen table for 45 minutes last night. Around and around and around, because I had to stop at the end, but the End eluded my grasp, as it eludes everyone who stares at time going by, slipping and spinning away before their eyes. You pulled me from my orbit, haven't been quite spherical since.

Circles are the shape of the universe, and every soul is a universe, or so I've been told. Universes keep spinning and spinning in circles, orbiting around and around and everything comes around again, but I can't rely on your face looking the same every revolution. No orbit, no circle is perfect when your gravity pulls us out of place. Nothing is truly round, not even spherical Earth, your grasp wringing it into a false god, an oblate spheroid. I am never quite in the same place, spinning closer and closer to you.

I was born spinning circles around my mother's head until my dizzy eyes dropped closed and universes were shrouded with darkness and the stars shone brighter to compensate. Light-years away, I only saw their glow brighten after many orbits, pirouetting, tracing circles in the sand, hours racing to keep up.

My eyes grew more wide-open each twirling revolution around the oceans of stars.
Universes won't go dark if I keep spinning. Nightmares are the fuel for bonfires/constellations, open my eyes wide and I'll burn them down into ashes/words. The light will reach me soon, but I cannot rest. Maybe the galaxies will keep spinning around my celestial body if I keep them in motion.

The light is here and it was here and it will always be here and the dancing spheres of light are begging me to dance with them, to spin, arms outstretched, and the aching, dazzling brightness is dancing with me, spinning and spinning until my eyes fly from my head and into the sky and I looked back at me and saw darkness, and

darkness dancing and tumbling and twisting into spirals and knots

and sometimes I think I am god,
as the universe within me spins and spins

and I am dying

walking in circles around my kitchen table







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