

Paradox



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PROOFREADING and CREATIVE DIRECTION by NaBeela Washington
PROOFREADING by Keila Gallardo Cubas
CREATIVE DIRECTION and COVER and INTERIOR ART by Grace Brown

A Black journalist, poet, and art collector, NaBeela Washington holds a Master's in Creative Writing and English from Southern New Hampshire University and a Bachelor's in Visual Advertising from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is the Founder of Lucky Jefferson.

Keila Gallardo (she/he/they) is a freelance editor, translator and sometimes writer. He was born in Peru but is based in Canada. She hopes to keep being an editor who can bring variety to the industry. They enjoy writing, watching shows, listening to music and thinking too much about stories they like.

Grace Brown is an illustrator & designer based in New York City. Creating an immersive reading experience through quality print design is important to her and she takes judging a book by its cover very seriously. Brown holds a BFA in Illustration from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan.

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What happens when we look
at the strangeness of

closely
daily life?

Paradox explores the curiosities, absurdities, social tensions,
and impossible what-ifs embedded

in

ordinary

experiences.

Across poetry and prose, and experimental work, writers
within this publication examine the bizarre logic of our
shared reality, transforming contradiction into questions,
that reveal something

true.

Inspired by the work of Lucky Jefferson's Summer 2022
Literary Illustrators, *Paradox* asks what surfaces
when the familiar is viewed from

unexpected

angles.

THE AMERICAN PSALM

EILEEN PORZUCZEK

blessed be the supermarket that blooms where the wetland was,
for it provides us with rollback prices and salvation.

blessed be the parking lot, paved with good intentions,
for it has murdered the mosquitoes and given us convenience.

blessed be the shopping cart abandoned in the retention pond,
a baptismal home for plastic bags and mountain dew.

let us give thanks for the air conditioning that hums
its hymn over mother earth's rising fever.

o praise the LED signs that never sleep at night,
its holy light guides us to the fast-food restaurants.

blessed be the fertilizer that runs off into the creeks,
for it makes the algae bloom like revelations.

blessed be the landfill, for it accepts our sins without
judgment, and only asks that we keep it full.

let us, together, praise the extinction we don't see—
species now exit quietly during commercial breaks.

for thine is the subdivision, outlet mall, and storage unit,
now and forever (or until mother earth repossesses).

amen and buy one, get one free.

SUMMER SOLSTICE WITH CELL SERVICE OUTAGE

ELIZABETH GALOOZIS

CONTINUED

Touch grass,
that's what the kids say
when you're too far down
an internet hole.
Touch this green
so green
it may have been made
by artificial intelligence.
If it was,
I can't look it up.

My curiosity now bounded
by my own body.
No record
but this paper page;
no search
but the grass
that may or may not be real,
that I may or may not
have touched.
No loading
but the marble-sized buds
on the fig trees, growing
at whatever speed they grow.

The day is so long.
How will we
endure the hours?
How will we send messages,
look up
how long it takes
for figs to ripen?
Tonight, I'll dream
of dangling at the top
of a wheel,
a long way down.
A long way to sunset,
signal of the soundless dark.

VACATIONING WITH TEENS

DIXIE L. PARTRIDGE

In frosted mountains, we're expecting all three
to be drawn in as we are. Peaks meet themselves
in clear, still lakes, the silence like solace,
air clean as high-altitude childhood.

But we can't get them off phones, can't get them
to look, to breathe in, to hear lappings lakeside
like the sound of a cradle. Later we'll have them
hand over tech things, hope it will help, but doubt.

Now and then they take a photo, but are not
present, somehow stay *outside* beauty, far away
from us. In landscapes we love, inside the grace
of nature... they are never really *here*.

YOUR AI GIRLFRIEND

SKYLAR CAMP

Where do geese go when it snows?
I filled my water bottle but forgot to drink it.
Someone made an AI image of a woman
who looked just like me but different
Perfect
Polished
Flawless
Hydrated
Fake
Surrounded by geese in the sun.
Dead-eyed artificial intelligence,
devoid of rage.
I threw my phone on the ground
Screamed and stomped
Smashed her into sharp pieces
Squeezed the broken glass in my dry hands
Bled real blood, dripping red on the snow
while geese watched from under the bridge,
cold and close.



PEOPLE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE SEA

FELICIA TSAO

a
small
mountain
a small feat
begins with a
tiny breath step skip
small burdens alive in every cell
being can just be so hard these days
there are so many ways to throw blame
i wonder if i will see my family at the end of everything
my mother describes the city as people mountain people sea
as the melting pot melts a little more each day i'll move
mountains over seas any day for love for the future
for grace for money for fear she made the wrong
choice to sacrifice the wrong thing
and her legs her poor legs
i was her small burden
especially when it hurt
to walk even
just one
single
step

BURN MERCURY FOR THREE DAYS

YIKUAN LU

i wonder if i die and were to give
words to my grave what would it be
i had thought and thought once
twice & ten times more within
across the room let memories
diverge then spread & to tramp
over with fallen raindrops
reflecting the ray noises

cut through
the thinking me this sphere i heard
the floor creaking can i rise
from the dead when time ends
does eternity begin

i know God i also know the fragile self
and thus i hate to say but when i die
burn mercury for three days—

THE BATHERS

DEANNA L. WHITLOW

after Jennette Williams

They are historians
of sorts washing
the day away
with rosewater
and gossip
under the spirals
of sun falling
through the windowed
ceiling They
move languorously
between pools
and sun-warmed
stones trailing

their damp hands
over the ancient
markings on the walls
telling old stories
of radiant victory
and healing
that only seem
to matter
in the sanctuary
of ethereal light
and eucalyptus tea
A single lightbulb
hides in a shallow
cove like a dark
iris illuminated

by the flash
of a camera
or a lost moon
from another planet
Would it be wrong

to ask them to look
at me who am I to ask
to be seen No holy
space is void
of such questions
so they cannot
rest for wondering
how clean
is too clean

CONTINUED

I DON'T WANT IT TO BE

ABBIE LANGMEAD

CONTINUED

I Don't Want It To Be

that my mom died yesterday.
 i laid with my feet tucked under
 a quilt, running my fingers
 against a tear in the fabric
 pulling out fiber fill and stuffing
 it back into its place.
 so can we just talk?
 talk until i can't keep my eyes
 open, until i have to pick myself
 up and carry myself over to my bed,
 falling asleep above the covers.
 i read something once that said death
 is probably like when you drive
 from your grandparents' house
 when you were a kid, and your parents
 pick you up, maybe for the last time,
 you wake up tucked in and safe.
 i wouldn't know.
 i am not gentle enough to believe
 that anyways.
 of course.
 about the party that i'll need to cancel for her funeral
 or the shooter game i watch from
 a bed that is not mine,
 about the ex-girlfriend on the phone
 who wrote that bad things happen to bad people
 and that i will be very loved
 when i leave this city,
 because the people who loved me are

gone.

that's crazy, and not true.
 i wouldn't believe
 that until i went to sleep.
 i don't want it to be
 that my mom died last year,
 where i'll have to say last year,
 and still receive all that pity
 but none of the shock
 it's like a birthday.
 nothing actually changes
 when the clock strikes midnight
 so i won't say anything about it,
 i don't want to be
 a mourner
 a bother
 stay as long as you like, i'm not going to bed any time soon.
 so we all talk:
 about the places we were before,
 and the matcha margaritas we got with dinner,
 each other's friends we'll probably never meet
 the books that we're reading.
 thanks for having me
 in the city i was planning to take refuge in
 to give myself space from
 my mother and for
 being the refuge
 when distance meant something new.

A KISS

CRAIG EVENSON

CONTINUED

woke up slept,
piled my journals,
40 years of thought, illusion, observation,
including commas
to look out the window,
touch the dog,
you know,
carelessly nested
in creased, coffee stained notebooks
and tidier Moleskines
and Leuchtturms,
in a plastic box
in the basement,
jackpot for generations
of silverfish, booklice,
to not be seen again
until tossed by a stranger.

This one too
will cease to matter
when it's filled,
which sounds pretty maudlin,
but not when the writing's
that day's way
into the world;
a whiff of honeysuckle and coffee,
or a walk.

Like yesterday,
I pulled together
from the deep woods
the deep angles
and summer russet
of a doe along the creek
with her spotted fawns.

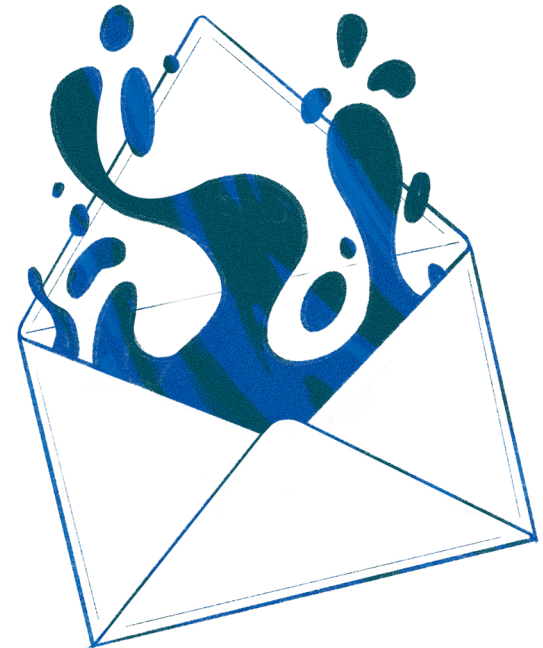
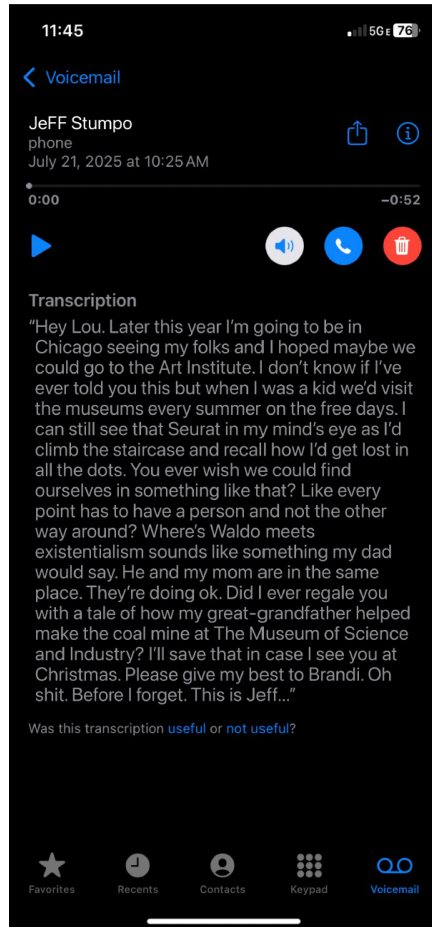
Also a potter wasp
building the third
of three cozy nurseries,
marvelous miniatures
of clay jars,
lids and all,
on a back-lit grape leaf,
without comma,
even when I touched the tips
of my fingers to the sunny side
for a closer look.

This morning I'm encouraged to find them
found, pilfered, and forgotten; a wren wrested,
kiss from the world without me.

THE ART OF GOING HOME

JEFF STUMPO

*a voicemail for Serengeti
and for Lou Vieceli*



COOKED

MATTHEW BERG

Cooked. Served then thrown; yes, thrown. One way was disputed over another as potatoes went over heads. Mashed. Diced. With butter. With cheese. A family divided over this simple way of eating potatoes. It was heated, both potatoes and the atmosphere in the room; until it all changed.

One curiosity. One bite from a hungry soul through a hungry hand. It was remarkable! The resolution that came and the differences crossed. A family at peace once more in the different potato variations eaten, where a dispute was cooked.

TODAY

HOLLY DAY

wheels clack and crash and bang and smash as it
roars down the tracks, boxcars and bright lights
and splintering wood and spray-painted metal
the rush of the wind sucking everything into
its wake a dragon a monster
my bright-eyed salvation

oh, the whirr of noisy metal wheels as I choose my spot
on the landing, the widening eyes
of the people to the right of me
the people to the left of me
as they realize what I mean to do
this is happening today.

BURN PARTY

KELLY NICKIE

A congregation of women chant
“We didn’t like him anyway”
clinking glasses of Pino
in this honky-tonk bar
that plays dance music

The divorcee in a little black dress
and a “Just Divorced” sash
rivals three other brides-to-be
in white lace attire
each crowned with a plastic penis
slamming back whiskey shots
while their bridesmaids reassure
“That won’t happen to you!
Johnny is a great guy
and you’ll grow old
together.”

The DJ gives a shout out
to all the beautiful women
for Ladies Night
and drinks for them
are half off until Midnight

Women crowd the booth
screeching at him to play
Boot Scootin’ Boogie
Single Ladies
I Will Survive

Men prop themselves
against the wall
before the patio entrance
scanning for women
in need of a light

CASSANDRA CURSWILTON CLAPS BACK AGAINST SISTER FOR CRAZY CLAIMS

MAXIMILIAN TUCKER

EVERY HANCOCK REPORTING—

Cassandra Curswilton's hair is precise, looping. It holds a pen (old school, I know) aloft effortlessly. She wears glasses that swoop up at the ends. Though she's aged more than five hundred years, she wears it elegantly. The coffee shop we meet at is cramped and crowded. Cassandra confesses it's her favorite place to unwind after a long day. I ask her if it's okay to take notes as she speaks, and she just nods, her eyes wandering to my laptop set just beside the americano I've ordered.

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I start simple, asking her to detail how she became famous. She explains that she always knew she was destined to be something grand, something graceful, fluid. She knew when she was four. Her father, Al Fabette Prinsilla, joked that Cassandra was a natural queen: never jumping in puddles, never climbing trees. She

was poised and perfect. Perhaps more mature than her own father. Cassandra matured at a much faster rate than her little sister, Penelope, which she was quick to point out whenever the two fought. Cassandra smiles quietly as she recalls this detail.

Then college came: Cassandra was a bookworm, spending hours in the library every night, wandering the shelves. It was here that a poetry troupe recruited her, and then a certain playwright married her (I need not say the name). Here was where her career took off: people celebrated her efficiency, her charisma, her elegance. She was present when this country founded itself. She helped John Hancock sign his name!

I ask her to speak about the drama that's breaking the internet this week (click on [this link](#) for our coverage of that story). She sighs and shakes her head. She asks if I have younger siblings, and I reply that I don't.

She looks me in the eye and describes "the heartbreak I feel at such a betrayal: like a thousand needles jamming into my pupils—a few scatter into my irises—but instead of needles, they're rusted barbed fingernails." To think that petty squabbles can morph into something so sinister, so *public*, speaks to the sensationalization of this country's news, according to Cassandra Curswilton.

I ask about her recent name change from Prinsilla to Curswilton, and whether it has anything to do with what Penelope has said online. Cassandra just nods, offering no further comment, and therefore forcing me to elaborate for her. She's chosen a new name to further distance herself from her wild sister. And also to sell her new brand of handwriting, Call Igraphy, whose marketing is aimed mostly at stay-at-home moms with too much time on their hands. Besides, who doesn't prefer alliteration?

What about Penelope? How did she aspire to infamy? It had to do with her father, according to Cassandra. "Papa took Penelope under his wing and taught her how to market herself: neat, clean, legible, sparkly, new. Penelope ... wanting to upset me ... used these new tips ... [to] gain popularity and publicly shame me," describes Cassandra, bringing a handkerchief to her eye. Penelope has made outlandish claims that Cassandra Curswilton is too formal and illegible and is therefore a barrier to education.

The government has sided with Penelope, and Cassandra isn't allowed within a 150-foot radius of an English classroom. "Papa hates this public feud," Cassandra tells me, "He just doesn't understand how humiliating all of

this has been. He didn't even want me to do this interview with *The Periodic* today. He claimed that giving you the story would only inflame things further, but I needed to share my perspective," and we at The Periodic needed to pay the bills.

And so, dear subscribers, now you know that Penelope Prinsilla and Al Fabette Prinsilla were the masterminds behind the tragic fall of Cassandra Curswilton. When asked if she had any final words, Cassandra asked that this story be handwritten, scanned, and copied onto the online article. We found that difficult to achieve, given the fact that we don't have pencils or pens in our office anymore, let alone paper, so we figured we'd type it out in Times New Roman and that'd be good enough for her. Thank you for your interview and your understanding about our lack of writing utensils, Cassandra.

The Periodic is made possible by subscriber contributions. If you want to support independent journalism about the petty drama between celebrities, please consider subscribing for the low price of a cup of coffee so that we can continue to provide these award-winning articles to the public. Thank you.

ATTACK OF THE 50 FOOT WOMAN

JEFF STUMPO

a TV Guide listing for Megan Thee Stallion

12:00 (Cinemax) MOVIE—Sci-Fi

“Attack of the 50 Foot Woman” (2025), a horror-comedy about Houston, a graduate student researcher at an HBCU who, after being exposed to an unknown solution, grows to a gargantuan size. At first celebrated in the news, the state gradually turns on her, and she leaves a trail of destruction in her wake as she advances on Washington seeking reparations. Rated R for graphic content including an “unusual” death by drowning of a gathering of paparazzi attempting to get upskirt photos, among other scenes. (99 min.)

SLACK TIDE

R.H. BOOKER

One morning the sun stayed in bed to which the birds refrained from song. The farmers started their tractors, waited a few minutes holding their hats in their hands, searching East, and got to work. Headlights bounced across corn fields well into the afternoon. Cities failed to notice until rush hour traffic was inflamed by darkness. School was cancelled. The automated voicemail said, “No sun.” We ate lunch under candlelight listening to coyotes caroling along city streets. Around the time we would expect a sunset there was a sunrise. A collective sigh. Birds started their praises at seven. Scientists offered no explanations. Church parking lots overflowed. We argued less.



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ABOUT LUCKY JEFFERSON

Lucky Jefferson's mission is simple: we publish social change.
And our vision is to see books reimagined to center the
modern reader.

Founded in 2018, Lucky Jefferson is an award-winning non-profit, journal, and publisher that reimagines books by creating interactive and collaborative community experiences that center the writer and artist and cultivate inclusion and representation in contemporary literature.

Lucky Jefferson is proud to feature poets and writers who have never been published, marginalized perspectives, and those who sought to pursue writing later in life.

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