

BIRTHDAY POEM

by Zoë Fay-Stindt

You can't write a poem about turning twenty-nine
and watching the valley of your childhood catch flame, ushering
a lost bat out of your too-bright bathroom. Instead, spin slow
on your roasting spit to greet the fan's wind in your sheets. Repeating:
I won't pretend to be spotless, I hold my grief in two possible arms.
The geckos in the house now, managing the flies. And later, between
the bellies and bosoms of crumbling stones, your ex kisses the dust
-slick neck of his girl as she puts her hair into a ponytail while you try
not to watch. Above, purple lights project the musician's shadow
in monster-size on the limestone pillars. You weave between
the crowd of jumping bodies to ask strangers if they have
any weed, please, until a man slurs his body into you,
melting from the night's solid heft, and says, *A joint*
for a kiss, groin angling. Like it always is at the end of the world,
the mosh pit's dust hardens into black snot in our nose-caves
while the smoke catches in the sunset like someone else's poem.
In the morning, your sister picks hornworms off her tomatoes
over FaceTime, shows you fungi gathering into tiny bird nests,
and says, *I believe in your heart*. Tells you
to write it down.