

# Alchemy 2025



# ALCHEMY

## EDITORS

Sam Galster

Kamea Gray

Anthony Guerra

Aaron Hilton

Kati Kim

Ben Meulners

Julie Rose

Svetlana Tomlin

Rahim Welch-Lucier

Cassius Wolfstar

# SPECIAL THANKS TO:

---

## FACULTY ADVISOR AND MENTOR

Megan Savage

## DEAN OF READING, WRITING AND ENGLISH

Chris Rose

## IAA II, ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Jaime Carbone

## GRAPHIC DESIGN INSTRUCTORS

Daniel Soucy

Aubree Holliman

## SYLVANIA PRINT CENTER

Angie Bulsiewicz

Ty Graham

Maggie Songer

© 2025 by Portland Community College  
All Rights Reserved  
PO Box 19000, Portland, Oregon 97282-0990

First North American Serial Rights held by Portland Community College.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

First Edition  
Cover Design by Janet Garcia  
Printed in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Literary Arts Journal  
Volume 51  
Theme *Metamorphosis*  
Portland Community College  
Sylvania Campus  
Editing and Publishing  
Spring 2025  
Portland, Oregon

# CONTENTS

---

## POETRY

A Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch: On Poetry	11
Forever As You Are	12
Scarecrow	13
Laurus Nobilis	14
Ode to My Other	16
Five Point Harmony	18
My Soul To Take	20
Blue Is Not a Color	22
Wound-Salve	23
Autobiography of My Childhood	25
What Smooth Currents Could Be	27
bribery wars, but with mom	29
The Dead Houseplant	30
If It Falls	31
Collision Event	32
Existential Chrysalis	33

## FICTION

Mother, Feeder	40
Onions, Carrots, Parsely, Sweet Potatoes, a Carton of Milk	48
Girls Grow Faster	52
The Meat Tenders	58
Apex	66
Anadromous	69
Let's Get It Together, Okay?	70
Pumpkin	74

## NONFICTION

Coming To Terms With Place	82
Once A Marine	84
To Terese	86
Where My Childhood Lived	94
Raven's Nest	97

# CONTENTS

---

## ARTWORK

Softly the Light Returns	10
Fruitbowl Domain	17
Tanner	21
The Stolen Child	24
May The Circle Be/Sill	28
Epy Vision	34
612	35
Face 001	36
Misjudgement	37
Chicken Going to Heaven	47
Reflection	57
Exposure Therapy	63
Menopause	64
Off Air	65
Lifecycle	68
The Man Who Lost His Face	73
Manzanita Sunset	75
The Last One Left	76
Snake and Tree	77
Mirabelle	78
The Red Robe	79
Space Ring	83
Untitled	85
Into The World	96



# EDITORS' NOTE

---

Times are changing fast, and so are we.

While envisioning this issue of *Alchemy*, we chose *Metamorphosis* as our theme. We thought about transformation in all forms—internal and external, chosen and imposed. Metamorphosis is a process, the in-between and all-around of a changing situation, the distance from one static point to the next static point. Metamorphosis is sometimes witnessed in the moment as it happens, but oftentimes it is only after it has become total, irreversible, and retrospectively inevitable.

Whether or not we choose to change feels more like a repercussion of human agency and free will. In “Apex,” a character must navigate a world she cannot control, yet she still has some choice in how to exist within it. Her agency lies in how she reshapes herself.

Metamorphosis can be painful; some things, like a caterpillar dissolving in the cocoon, are left behind. In “Ode to My Other,” we’re invited into the sorrow of that shedding—a longing for who we were, or who we might have been. Even an absence of stress can reveal us to ourselves, allowing us to explore ourselves more. In “The Meat Tenders,” transformation is messy and brutal; still it contains enormous personal significance. Growth is rarely gentle.

Other stories show us what it means to witness transformation in someone else. “Girls Grow Faster” explores how the changes we don’t choose—or don’t yet understand—can shape us powerfully. Sometimes change can leave us lost, grasping for straws, only to learn what it means later in life. In “Let’s Get It Together, Okay?” the protagonist knows something must shift but needs help to name it. Sometimes, we need others to evolve.

And sometimes the person who helped us find ourselves can be taken away from us, making grief change us again, like in “To Terese,” a powerful elegy for a person who changed the author. In their absence, we remember the people who helped us become.

The world would be a very mundane place if things were not constantly transforming. Change might be the only thing that is constant. In poems like “If It Falls” and “The Dead Houseplant,” we see time’s passage in seasons, in small deaths, in fragile blooms.

If change is inevitable, how we move through it is uniquely human.

Sometimes we resist. Sometimes we surrender. Sometimes we rebuild, and sometimes we make heavy revision. Nothing stays still. And, sometimes, there’s comfort in that. We hope the works you find in this issue of *Alchemy* resonate with your own changes—those you’ve chosen, those you’ve endured, and those you’re still moving through. You are not alone in the struggle. In this issue, we are holding space—for anger, for joy, for mourning, for collapsing into nothingness & re-emerging as a changed self. For metamorphosis.

— Alchemy Editors

# POETRY

---





*Softly the Light Returns* • Sandrine Jacobson  
oil on canvas

John Peter Beck

---

## A Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch: On Poetry

If you stare  
long enough,

it will change  
or you will.

## Forever As You Are

Say you want a decorative fish tank, but have no time to keep up with maintenance.

You get yourself a living fish and an identical mechanical fish in case the first one dies. (The onlookers will suspect nothing.) It swims in slow waters while tiny air pockets lock to its fins, reflecting rainbow light on its scales shining through the glass pane. And it swims in stasis in a habitat deader than its fleeting short-term memory. Eventually, there is a consequence as equally fleeting: one day you feed it too much, or not enough, or forget to fix the water filter, or—perhaps the cat reached into the fish tank and ate the poor thing.

You wind up the mechanical fish and drop him into the tank. Its batteries will last a lifetime—at least, a lifetime a fish should have—so you stop worrying about the onlookers’ suspicious gazes. It swims around in stasis, aimlessly hiding behind plastic seaweed and off-colored rocks only to peek out again for a display showing. Do you pity it? Do you pity that which walks with no conscience? Onlookers can press their faces against the glass pane, mesmerized by the rainbow patterns reflecting off the mechanical fish’s metallic scales. There is no consequence for pushing a bit too close, or tapping the glass a bit too hard. (Part of you wishes there was a consequence.)

You, knowing that fish is different from the one who died, still lose track of the difference sometimes. Is it sympathy, or is it selfishness? Say you want to make a decorative fish tank, but any living organism would be too much to take care of.

One day you find yourself drenched in June rain. What good is June if not for contrarian weather and disappointment? Aimlessly walking through apartment hallways toward the guts of the building, briefly meeting eyes with an onlooker from the yonder side of the glass pane. In your circumstance, there is a consequence for any action that is done by or to you. Perhaps those consequences cost you a life opportunity; suppose you want to live on a lush field in the countryside, but all your favorite flowers are forever out of season. Any glimpse of them comes forth in the form of raining petals carried by eastbound winds. You settle for photography.

Do I pity you for living half-dead in a world even deader than the corpses we’ve strung along?

No—

It’s not too late to make things more beautiful, while the rushing lake reflects the colors of the sky.

## Scarecrow

Into the field of corn I went,  
looking for a ball. The rows  
were straight, the downward curving leaves  
bright green.

I traced the narrow path of the tiller  
who’d buried seeds  
that rose through dampened soil  
like hungry children, groaning as they grew  
through the night.

I could hear the players talking  
but walked on between  
the heavy cobs as far-off voices  
called my name.

With forearms twisted like manzanita,  
I knelt in the narrow aisle  
above the chaff that fell around me.  
Rising up on toes stiff as clothespins,

I saw, far off, a cloud of locusts  
thickening like curd in the descending  
sky. A tattered and faded shirt  
billowed about my Dust Bowl frame.

## Laurus Nobilis

The trees say Daphne was  
no myth. They say she ran  
on shapely legs beneath their

boughs the way the wind  
moves, that her song warmed  
their sap and bade them wave

their crowns at the heavens,  
that they welcomed her  
as a daughter as the leaves

sprouted from slim fingertips,  
aromatic, later to be plucked  
by hunters wives to be dried

to flavor the stew. The trees  
say she tells stories of pools  
of water and light. They say

she has always been evergreen,  
the little laurel in their midst.  
That her roots tremble at the trill

of running water, that when  
nymphs pass she blooms strangely,  
small greenish-yellow flowers

without petals, small purple-black  
berries. The trees say she protects  
small sparrows and provides

succor to the songbirds who nest  
in her arms. The older trees say  
sometimes when the sun shines

too brightly she startles, forgets  
she is firmly rooted, and no longer  
has to outrun the lustful chase

of a god. The trees say her dreams  
sound like a forest fire, crackling,  
like young saplings snapping.

## Ode to My Other

Our parents still ask about you  
chase your echo through the branches  
of the strangler fig in your place  
at the dinner table, where I  
embody the distance it takes  
to keep you safe.

They dissect me  
from your photograph, the surrogate  
with a painted grin, the Ritalin shadow  
who ensnares your dimples. Where is he?  
The boy who wouldn't feign a smile  
whether saccharine, or in abject

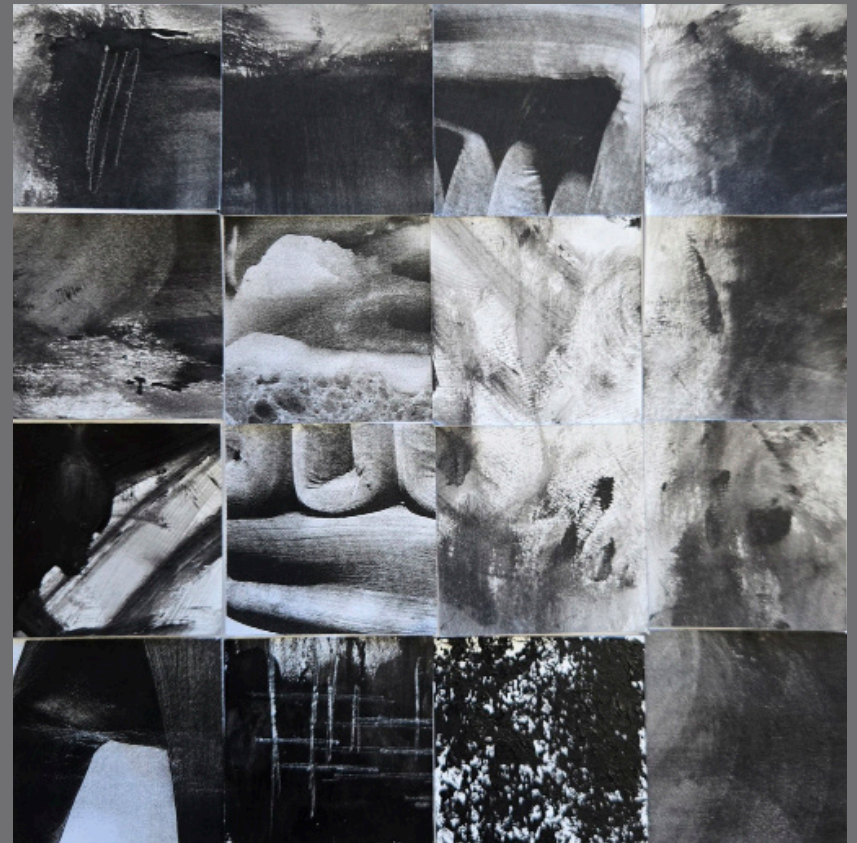
sorrow. You didn't mean to frighten them  
when the tears had no bottom, visitations  
of shuddering thunder that swallowed us  
in volatile red raw

Paralysis.

In the absence.

But the answer wasn't to force-feed you  
antonyms, the epithet soup of manhood  
slurred like a silver bullet without a mark.  
The kind of consolation that makes you hunger  
for distance, and drown in the need.

You laid to rest, and I grew around you  
a frigid cradle, the strangler fig  
who could brave the conflagration  
while you slept. But we still miss you  
my fraternal other, who can only bloom



*Fruitbowl Domain* • Kristian Torres  
acrylic on paper

## Five Point Harmony

### Number one

The sound of the cuckoo bird in my head explaining  
(in his own foreign language)  
that everything I have done in my life  
(save for feeding the birds whenever possible)  
could have been done more astute  
He doesn't know I don't listen  
or at least that I try not to  
but I don't speak cuckoo bird  
I never cared to learn  
Call that my own ignorance

### Number two

Blade whipped sky trail of mechanic muster  
Picture the sound of slicing through  
a lack of existence  
Tropospheric blender  
Horizon fruit ninja  
We have polluted as far as we can taste  
As far as we can cast our echo  
we can also cast our shame  
yet, we still all prefer the sound  
of something in living

### Number three

I prefer the sound of your quiet  
the sound your eyelashes make when they turn into wishes  
the sound of your smile suffocating rolling cheeks  
You are your own symphony  
I need not steal from  
but I'm looking for a harmony  
Perhaps the sound of our piggies  
wrestling against the blanket  
Or giggled distraction  
between the flipping of pages

### Number four

My rings clank together when I write  
Every typo has a different pitch  
My knuckles crack their necks  
in melody to bejeweled choir  
A malakite metronome  
When I can't paste thought  
into words  
I flutter them for a sound  
Something worth paint on paper  
typos be damned

### Number five

At one point in sound  
all the watches of the world will stop clicking  
There will be no more  
hands ticking and snapping  
and wasting each second away



## My Soul To Take

Writing exhausts me,  
I am tired of words.

I pray for God to grant me a beautiful voice instead,  
I will sing a tune and lovely, formless notes  
will flow from my mouth,  
I will not use it to make words any longer.

He does not grant my request so I beg for a beautiful body instead,  
I will use it to dance to a drumbeat, a guitar.  
I will not use it to convey a message,  
there will be no interpretation.

The Lord denies me this so I ask Him for a lover.  
I will rip open my chest to show Him my heart,  
so I will never have to speak the words.

Still, He does not relent,  
and so I pick up my pen,  
I open my mouth,  
I form the letters.

When God asks me why I did not pray for Him to take the pain away,  
I tell Him I did.



*Tanner* • Saoirse Chance  
oil on canvas



## Blue Is Not a Color

It sounds like warmth,  
the way you exhale more  
when you know that it  
takes to say my name.  
And your smile isn't with your eyes,  
but it's still you, it's still us.  
A descending crescendo of piano keys  
ignore me and step up into and  
against and the more you look at something  
the less you see it. A bright blue sky  
never decides to touch the heavens, but  
we face our lives with timeless ego  
and ignore the blood leaking from our necks,  
laughing, and the sun's harsh words and  
y'know? The moon's the night's sun,  
just already dead.

My heart acknowledges itself once more,  
and the sky folds in on itself because I let it, but  
my hands  
have no place to rest.  
The next autumn—without you is coming, and  
if I am near you  
I can try again and again and again  
and again 'cause I can't do it right. Can I—  
I can do it right, can I—

Remember when it snows? The snow  
falls, just so I can know it,  
clipped, for a lifetime.  
My hands are cold, so  
can you assure me, when I die,  
and I plan to die,  
you'll be falling down on me?

## Wound-Salve

We begin with the seasons in flux: sunshowers on the highway. Howling,  
reverberating winds. Wildfires birthing red-ashen skies. To ultimately thrive  
in these extremes: leathery foliage. Leaning palm trees. Mountains, basins,  
and yawning valleys. The scent of gardenias, honeysuckle, and frothy sea brine.  
A lonesome foghorn and a distant piano melody—conjured from veined,  
ancient hands sans solemnity. The hymn of second adolescence: to spend  
my thirties in the pews of my Truth. To numb grand emotions of rage and  
despair with 25mg of well-enough, feel good. To pivot from my  
siblings. To shed my surname. To stray, disobey. To live every day anew  
in spite of the periodic pain my body puts me through. Seeking connection  
among a chatter of parakeets, flying radiant green over breakwater blue.  
Fostering an alliance with the neighborhood cats: prowling through  
evergreen, napping under sunbeams, to later rise onto our haunches  
aglow in the glimmer of the moon. With a cheer clutching prayer: never  
dwell in the past. You don't get if you never ask. Be tenacious. Be true.

## Autobiography of My Childhood

As an infant, I dream  
a terrifying technicolor lion

I want to be freckles  
when I grow up

I want to be hair  
braided with bright boggles

*you have the wrong kind of hair*  
explains my mother, and I cry

at three I misunderstand  
my privilege, the first

porch of my childhood  
becomes a house of bees

becomes a one-room schoolhouse  
with a cold winter, wood burning stove

the birth of my baby sister means  
matching stuffed bunnies, bond for life

my father becomes a drawing, a mandolin  
hangs on the wall unplayed

in the 80s his walls become New  
York and California, young women

in school I'm labeled gifted  
accelerated, a paper racecar

I learn to be perfect  
and special and fear failure



*The Stolen Child* • Claudia Sanchez  
ink on paper

commercials teach me  
*never let them see you sweat*

my mother teaches me  
*women can do anything*

meaning *everything*  
meaning *must*

I'm confused about how  
eggs work, I make a nest

I want to be a bridge  
a wingspan, a home, a heart

racing, I dream of terrifying  
tidal waves, fireflies, faraway places

## What Smooth Currents Could Be

The currach body is frayed,  
weathered by the journey,  
passing cypress and willows  
that extend their branches,  
inviting rest beneath shade.

The shoulders become loose-  
hinges, rowing laments,  
with mercy-strokes prayers  
in the water of a birth corner.

Irrespective of moon charts,  
wind sleeps over streams  
asking if the rivers are lonely,  
melting snow on the way to the ocean?

I want an invisibility cloak  
to canoe and thrive wherever I please.  
But the ones I tried on  
were too small.  
blood kept spilling out  
of the lifeboats,  
giving me away to hostile eyes.

When I reach sea water  
I find other refugees,  
with wet shoes caked in mud and isolation,  
their minds locked inside the calculus of harm,  
*perish in place, riverboat, or jungle walk to a dream.*

I don't want to die with cisterns of doubt,  
muddy socks and windblown hair.  
I want to die adding sugar to my tea.

## bribery wars, but with mom

successfully, she had attempted a garden above & around where our third dog was buried. asparagus, chives, the herculean trial of a tomato. every other name of annual flower, bygone

histories, whatever else could fit beneath the cross braces. things the dog would have, before, eaten. the seeds were possibly an offering or proof of insurance. proud of taking a stab at change,

but unnecessary. fragile things don't have a chance to die, to at least  
relish the moment. for someone to come back, apply a trellis like a  
splint. those leaves snapped by the rain.



*May the Circle Be/Sill* • Carrie Dietz Brown  
watercolor on paper

## The Dead Houseplant

probably grown in cigarette ash this  
is an Oregon Coast plant  
nurtured from the wind she  
grew still knowing the beach air

we left her outside in the cold too long  
presently she sits unrevived  
upstairs by the window  
next to an awful cocaine-style coffee table  
an ex pawned off on me

ash builds up here too  
it was my hope the plant would enjoy it  
but her leaves droop  
her countenance a death gaze  
in her withering decomposure

where i swim on this labile Earth  
is just a temperate drive  
through forests on endless shores  
where anything can survive  
even the most scurrilous

now she is become driftwood  
like so much she loved  
on those embryonic beaches  
where life surpasses death  
in its feeding cycle

## If It Falls

January meets its demise  
bone-dry & clear-skied  
swing sets  
laden with hard years their  
rusted rivets screech  
hardly a walk in the park.

by the lake an abattoir soil-hewn  
redwood sentinel  
many centuries my senior  
lie still in the breeze  
sans ceremony.

nobody informed me  
of rupture, death-agony  
how obsequious how  
poor taste

you of all things  
[should have] survived a few lean years.

## Collision Event

Eventually,

The whole Milky-Way

And her beloved

Andromeda will

Spiral into one.

Stars — scattering,

As black-holes merge,

And celestial bodies are flung

Into wider orbits,

By gravity-waves——emitted

By galactic

Cores merging: two

Into

One.

## Existential Chrysalis

When I go,

I'd rather not have people say, Gone too soon.

I'd rather they say, He left right on time,

never overstayed his welcome,

went as he came—headfirst, pushing

through, shoulders high:

a pelvis-rocker, a breach-bopper,

unhinged and released, unstrung

and now deceased.

In relative terms, a contraction or three,

perhaps, freed and disentangled in space-time,

driven by a mysterious infectious energy,

affecting, boundless, all-encompassing.

Like a Venetian gondolier slicing through canals,

subverting surface tensions, delving deeper,

under bridges, over currents, constantly oaring,

even serenading—yet never boring.

I don't wanna be seen as a wannabe when I'm gone.

But a triple-dose of dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin

—that rush when you slow down and try to recall

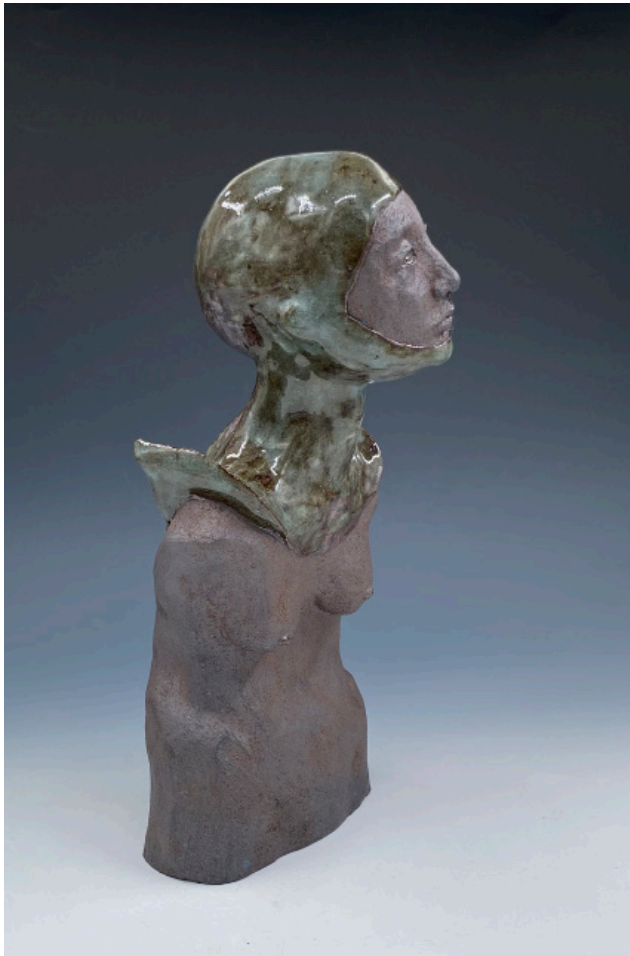
the way things were, my existence transparent,

shamelessly apparent, a translucent, winged memory

furiously flapping inside, then landing ever so gently,

in slo-mo, to pollinate the bouquet

of your heart.



*Epy Vision* • Maria Malankina  
stoneware clay



*612* • Maria Malankina  
stoneware clay





*Face 001* • Max Klein  
ceramic



*Misjudgement* • Liam Evenson-O'Neil  
ceramic



# FICTION

---



# Mother, Feeder

Kamea Gray

“Last night I dreamt of Aurenfeld, save that all the daisies had withered,” Mary said softly. Ilsa looked toward the water and didn’t respond, her thumb pressed lightly into her wrist.

The town was restless in the early light. Roused by the shouts of stevedores and the dull chime of a ship’s bell swinging in the cold air. A brigantine had come in with the tide, its sails stiff with salt. Clouds of breath rose from the men as their bodies moved quickly along the docks, preparing for the arrival. February had drawn in more traders than usual, and the narrow streets swelled with townsfolk. Mary had been awake since the bells tolled Matins, alongside the first stirrings of the town. She had long since grown used to the disturbance brought on by the early morning bustle.

42 Through the main door’s glass pane, she saw her sister on the terrace, watching chaos unfold in the streets. Mary stepped into the cold to join her, and pulled her woolen shawl tighter around her shoulders. The lake was a quiet witness, its surface undisturbed, but for the ripple of an oar or the distant cry of a gull. The stillness was deceptive. If anyone fell in at this time of year, the cold would seize them before they had the chance to cry out. Mary imagined it swallowing her whole, pulling her down into its depths. The thought came without warning, and left behind a dull unease.

“Will you tell Johann I said goodbye?” Ilsa asked, breaking her silence with a whisper—careful not to wake the boy. Mary smiled and offered a gentle nod, reaching out for Ilsa’s hand, “He’s going to miss you,” she said.

Ilsa’s ship was already moored at the dock, and it was past time for them to leave the house. Mary walked with her silently through market streets, littered with remnants of crates and cloth from the previous day. The port smelled of fish, wet wood, and the damp wool coats of the dockworkers. As the sisters approached the ship, the creaking hull of the vessel knocked bluntly against the pier.

The ship’s bell rang, and they shared a final embrace. Then, Ilsa was gone—swallowed by the surge of the departing crowd. Mary watched the ship pull away, and a coldness settled in her chest as she turned back home.

The wooden floor creaked beneath her step as she moved through quiet rooms, and into the guest bed, to tidy up after Ilsa. She hadn’t expected the house to feel so empty.

She thought of Johann, still asleep, and went to wake him.

Mary walked past her son’s bed and drew the curtains—letting warm daylight spill into the gloomy space. She turned, reaching out her hand to his shoulder, then staggered back.

For a brief, terrible moment, she thought she had entered the wrong home.

Right there in her son’s bed lay a tall, gaunt figure—steel-colored, old, and reeking like death. If it weren’t for the faint birthmark on his arm, which she had traced with her fingertip since he was a child, she might have thought him an intruder. Then came the sound of slow breath through his now-haggard nose, that carried a tone only his mother could recognize.

It was Johann.

“My god, what’s happened to you?” Mary cried, her voice cracking as she raised a hand to shield her eyes. Johann opened his mouth in response, but could only muster a sullen groan.

Mary stumbled back hesitantly, then stood entirely still—unblinking, as she examined the boy for what felt like an eternity. His chest was like a washboard, fixed below his grayish skin—slick with cold sweat, metallic in sheen, and clinging tightly to the sharp ridges of his body. His cheekbones emerged like mountains under his wide eyes, now sunken deep in their socket. And his once soft face, now dry and brittle, flaked off like ash—even on his scalp, where hair now thinned in sparse patches, unable to take root in his sickly flesh. Johann was still half covered under the bedding, but Mary could only imagine his stomach sunken in too, and starved like the rest of him.

Struggling to tilt his head, Johann looked up at his mother in confusion, and Mary reached out for his hand—his nails had grown long and yellowed. She tried to help him out of bed to better have a look at the rest of him, but he was too weak to pull himself up.

Somehow, this had to be her fault, she thought. The disease must have been progressing for a while, and she was too oblivious to see it. *Things like this don’t come from nowhere.* She felt it was far more sensible to go into town and find a doctor to explain it, rather than frighten Johann further with her tears.

Mary could not say how long she had been gone—it was nearly dusk now, and time seemed to have lost its shape. She hurried the old man through the wooden gate, into the house, and at last to Johann’s room. The doctor halted abruptly under the door frame.

“He’s very sick, as you can see,” Mary said to him, through unsteady breath. She saw at once the change in the man’s face—a pallor that crept up from his neck as he stepped closer to her son’s bed. The old man reached out warily, resting a hand on the boy’s cheek, then drew back suddenly as if it bit. His eyes hovered above Johann’s skin, examining the sallow color—a hue like something already beginning to leave the world. He stepped back, furrowing his brow.

“And when did this start?” he asked, voice guarded.

“This morning,” Mary said quickly. “He was well yesterday, I swear it.”

He looked at her as if she were a child telling an absurd lie. “My sister was with us all month, she would say the same—” His expression did not change.

“Well, is she here now?” the old man asked. “If you don’t give me the truth, I can do nothing for the boy.” Mary opened her mouth to convince him, but no words came. “Then for now,” he began, fastening the buckles of his satchel, “there is nothing I can do.” He turned and made his way out the door. “Find me again once you’ve found an honest answer.”

She called out to him with a breaking voice, pleading, but he did not look back. A dread crashed down on the floor beneath her and pulled at her feet like quicksand. She went and sat on the side of Johann’s bed, running her fingers through what was left of his hair—though she wouldn’t meet his gaze—and trailed her thumb along his rough face. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, leering down at the bedding. Her throat tightened around the words, and she felt her heart and stomach weighing deep in her bones. She had nobody at the house to help her. She wondered if she should tell anyone at all. She thought about going to the neighbors, but what would they see? A mother with a starving child. A monster who neglected her own son. Maybe they’d be right.

*How was it possible that she hadn’t noticed sooner?* Surely Ilsa would have said something. Though her sister was one to mind the privacy of others, even family—if Mary wrote to her and found that Ilsa hadn’t noticed either, she might come back in a panic. She might think the same as the neighbors would. That couldn’t happen. She would have to deal with this on her own.

Mary woke the next morning from irregular dreams, sunken into her bed, and felt the ceiling above press down upon her. Today, she would try to make him eat. Soft things, she thought, if his teeth were like the rest of him. She ought to have spent the night in a chair beside Johann, but she couldn’t bear to look at him. She could only keep her composure for so long before she felt the urge to run off and weep behind closed doors. Still, a good mother would have stayed and held his hand through the night. It was harder still to think of him lying alone in that room.

She laid out a plate of salted herring and a single slice of bread, setting it down gently on Johan’s bedside table. Mary went to draw the curtains as usual, but as she reached for the fabric, a faint murmur escaped him—in protest—and she left the room dark. She pressed the back of her hand to Johann’s forehead and felt that he was running a fever. She held a cool washcloth to him as she fed him small bites of fish, hopeful he might get better despite his reluctance to eat.

This meal had become their daily ritual. For he wanted little else but to eat in the morning and sleep the rest of the day. And though some days proved more difficult, his condition had not changed. For better or worse, he remained like this—silent as a mummy.

Each morning, Mary awoke to the same helplessness, loathing the smell of salted herring and porridge—which she had found to be his favorites. She tried to give him other foods—like boiled cabbage or cheese—but he would not move, part his mouth, or even glance at his mother if she brought anything else to his room. It was strange. Johann never held a liking for fish before he fell ill, yet now it seemed the only thing keeping him from death. And he had no weight left to lose. If he starved any further, he would die. She couldn’t stand the thought of losing her son, her precious boy.

On Sundays, Mary walked to the harbor to buy more salted herring and food for herself, then wandered the market streets before returning home. She no longer went to church, though she had never gone often. She believed in God still, but doubt crept in more with each passing day. And she didn’t much care for church folk.

Somehow, each time, Mary forgot that putrid smell until she opened the door. The stench of decay, of pickled fish, and the warmth of porridge, waited thick in the air. It was at its worst in Johann’s room, and lingered throughout their home. No matter what she tried—open windows, vinegar, dried lavender, or rosemary—the odor remained.

Still, she hid her disgust and forced herself to sit beside him as he ate by her hand—as she fed him, washed him, or changed his clothes. She told him she loved him—whenever he was awake to hear it. But now, each time she said the words, she was no longer sure they were true. A horrible thought. She pushed it away as soon as it came, but it returned, again and again.

*Of course I love him, he's my son. I love him so very much.* She thought. *It's the sickness and the smell that I hate.* Mary still felt warmth when she met his gaze, still looked for the boy he had been beneath this new, lifeless skin. In fleeting moments, she let herself believe that nothing had changed, that he was as he had always been. But without his laughter, or his endless stream of questions she had so cherished, the illusion never lasted long. Could a person remain the same after such a terrible transformation? She wanted to believe so. But the doubt ate at her, gnawed at her like a dog. And guilt, more viscous than anything she had ever known, followed her like a shadow, whispering—and she waited like prey for it to consume her.

46 The days blurred together until one morning Mary could no longer handle the odor. Instead of sitting beside Johann and feeding him bits of fish, she set the plate down on his lap with a fork and knife, then left without a word. She closed the door behind her, and for the first time since it began, she felt relief. She wasn't sure if he could eat on his own, but she had never asked him to try. Through the thick wooden door she said, "I'll be back within the hour," and hurried out of their home—down the stone steps, and through tall grass, toward the small, rocky bank of the lake. The morning was foggy, the salty air felt fresh. She looked around to the smoke soaring from her neighbors' chimneys, to the damp grass, and to the muted blue of the sky. Again, the lake called to her—and as the mist rose above it, she thought that this time she might let herself drift away.

She looked behind her, to their house on the hill, and picked at her skin around the nail until it bled and stung in the cold air. It was almost time to return, but she didn't want to. She wished the water would carry her away to a far-off place—back to her sister, or down into the depths, where for a moment, she could think—alone in the great dark. And for a moment, she would be held, before the light faded away, above the current.

When she returned, it all came back to her.

Mary looked down at the floor, dirt scattered about—and in the kitchen,

noticed tufts of hair in the sink. *Had she not cleaned at all since it began?* She opened the door to Johann's room to see if he had eaten. The plate beside him was wiped clean. Somehow he had managed without her, though a few scraps still clung to his face. She picked up the washcloth, the one she had used for his fever some time ago. She hadn't remembered to wash it, and she couldn't recall when she had last thought to take it away.

Mary began leaving Johann alone at every meal. Then went to walk near the waterside, or lie in her bed. Her room had become her cave. She stared out her window at the lake each day, where for a few moments she would be spared. Sometimes, she could feel the pull of the water and the shift of the tide. And when it was quiet, she could hear the rushing blue. She would try to think of how Johann used to be in those moments. When she could, the memory felt like a drug. When she came back—and saw him as he was—she wished that he would die—that God would take one of them and end their pain. She wished that she had confided in her sister.

And as his disease grew worse, she felt that horrible guilt for wishing what she did, and fell to her knees in prayer, and said to the Lord, *I am not ready for him to leave.*

...

Now, when it comes time to feed him, her head rings so loud that she cannot hear anything else. Her skin shrinks tighter around her, as if stopping something inside her from crawling its way out. Some days, she sits alone at the dinner table, and all she can hear is Johann groaning behind her in pain and the faucet dripping slowly in the sink. She can barely eat now, surrounded by the rot that buries itself deeper into her son, wondering if she will ever escape it. In the mirror, Mary is not sure she recognizes herself anymore, this life of hers is beginning to feel like a distant memory. It is all too much. The only peace lies in the water. But she cannot leave him to suffer.

Again, she sits beside him, listening to the sound of his breath. A thin, labored wheeze. The sickness has hollowed his face, left his body limp, as driftwood. He does not speak anymore; he hasn't spoken in some time.

"Johann," she whispers, but there is no answer.

The room feels too small. The air is too thick. The stench feels as though it is seeping into her skin, into her lungs. Johann groans again, and the sound splinters through her skull like a knife. She cannot do this any longer. She cannot.

## KAMEA GRAY

Mary leans down, pressing her lips to his damp forehead. His breath rattles—a sound almost like a sigh. She closes her eyes. Her hands move before she can stop them. Gentle, like a mother soothing her child. Outside the lake is still. The tide does not draw in tonight—it only waits. It has *been* waiting.



*Chicken Going to Heaven* • Thu Nguyen  
photography

# Onions, Carrots, Parsley, Sweet Potatoes, a Carton of Milk

Svetlana Tomlin

Anna looks at the list once again. “Onions, carrots, parsley, sweet potatoes, a carton of milk.” She shouldn’t need a list, but he thinks that without it, she would spend too much time in the store—and even more money. As if it’s incomprehensible for her to come back without the yellow velvet head of Michelangelo’s David or a heart-shaped Snickers bar, because it’s January. Of course, she can just go from one aisle to another, no distractions, it’s mostly produce anyway.

She looks at the apples and sees a rotten one. Surely somebody should’ve sorted that out, because this one rotten fruit makes all the others appear rotten. Apples are not on the list. The bananas seem rotten too. They are also not on the list.

She makes her way to the onions, avoiding a festive cookie display. Now, moment of truth: Yellow or White. The recipe called for white ones, but she usually goes for the yellow ones. It’s not like the recipe is carved in gold on a tablet sent by God, so yellow should work.

The cookie display is bright and pink and is calling her name, so she returns. Maybe he would think that she is just being adorable, buying the heart-shaped cookies. A symbol of love. He would just say, “That’s so you, never stick to the list.” But in a loving way. She grabs a pack.

Carrots and sweet potatoes are both orange, so the fun of the roasted sheet is to figure out which one you’re eating. Anna always looks for fun in the mundane.

She sees the green of the hiding spot that parsley chose for itself, a tricky little guy. For a reason that escapes her, it is paired with smoothies. Smoothies always have interesting names. Why is the Strawberry Wise? What does the Blue Machine do? What are the effects of Mango Mania? Do people become crazy and loot the grocery store for mangoes? Do they take a loan to fill their house with mangoes? Smoothies are not on the list.

After the milk she can look at novelty mugs. Last time he got so mad because of the Golden Girls mug she brought. He made her throw away an old one with a frog playing a banjo. She cried in the bathroom. So she just looks.

Back home, the supermarkets are much smaller. There is never a whole aisle of just cereal, maybe two or three options. And a town like that, with just eight thousand people? Instead of supermarkets, there is usually a small shop where a lady with overgrown roots on her bleach blonde hair watches TV on that tiny screen and files her nails all day, and drunks buy cleaning solution instead of vodka. The lady is never happy, and you need to distract her from her shows, so she can reluctantly bless you with groceries. Shops like that are scattered around the town, and you have to remember which one has what. Anna left a town like that and never looked back.

The lime-colored owl taught her enough words to start chatting, and that pirating site with casino commercials had enough episodes of shows with subtitles to imitate speech. So when she met Josh, she knew it was a chance. He actually wanted to get to know her, not just demonstrate the treasures inside his pants. Nobody believed her when she told her friends about having a “real American” boyfriend. But he was real, just as the old song goes “American boy, American joy.”

Just a year of chatting with Google Translate and showing the goods followed by a trip to a Turkish resort got her the ring. She learned from Josh that American women forgot how to be women—they don’t value a good provider. Another year got her the visa, and now she is living the dream. She looks at the ring and continues the journey through the supermarket. The list is over, but Anna isn’t ready to go back. She strolls down to the snacks. Snacks are peculiar things.

You can find chips of any shape and size and made of every possible grain, and half of them claim to be the only healthy option, but none of them are paprika flavored. That used to be her favorite. She really wants the Sweet Maui Onion ones, but it’s unladylike to just sit on the couch and devour a bag of chips. Maybe she can sneak one in, just hide it somewhere and eat it on Saturday, as Saturdays are for boys. Okay, that’s going to be the last thing that’s not on the list.

She moves to the self-checkout. It’s easier that way. Nobody’s going to comment on her charming accent. The teenage girls in front of her are buying sour candy in an almost whole-sale amount, but what’s actually crazy is that all of them are wearing pajama pants. She knows better now, it’s not that they are having a pajama party on Tuesday afternoon, they just want to wear pajama pants. Maybe, if she has a daughter, her daughter will wear pajama pants just because she wants to.



She drives home, but stops at a mattress shop parking lot; these are always empty, so Anna thinks they must be a front for something. She reaches in her purse to fish out a little vape pen. Hiding the habit makes her feel like a little girl, but a lot of things do. It's not like a thing with a "Bluerazz" flavor is made for adults, but it beats smelling like an ashtray.

Anna looks at her watch and starts over the car. The GPS lady tells her to make a slight left in one quarter of a mile, but doesn't explain what it means. As she turns behind the middle school Anna sees kids play baseball, and gets angry at herself for not understanding the rules. She thinks that soccer is the only sport worth watching, but it's not like the home team will be in any championship anytime soon. Soccer is a stupid word – there is a foot and a ball, but somehow the proper name is taken by a sport where guys are running around holding a ball that's not even ball-shaped. Thinking about that just makes her roll her eyes.

Anna gets to Josh's. It's not a farm, but is farm-like. There are chicken themed plates and mugs and the cushions are also chicken-themed. Neither of them chose the decor, but he thinks it's a waste of money to change anything. Sometimes Anna imagines all the things she could get to make this place feel like home. Maybe she would replace all the chickens with hummingbirds or the great albatross. But it's far from being on the list. It's a whole house, it even has two bathrooms. She hides the fancy shampoo in the guest bathroom under the sink where the toilet duck lives.

"Hi baby," she calls as she makes her way to the fridge and unloads her bag. She is proud of the otter picture on it; she likes the themed bags. "I only got one thing off the list, don't be mad."

"You mean not on the list. That's so you, never stick to it" he says, his voice is cold as he approaches the kitchen.

Anna hears the TV talking about grocery stores and prices of eggs. "Maybe we could get a chicken?" she asks. "You grew up on a farm, you know what to do with them."

"That doesn't matter, don't stress your pretty head about it." He kisses her cheek. "Show me what you got."

"Only one thing off the list, I promise."

Josh looks at onions, carrots, parsley, sweet potatoes, a carton of milk, and looks at the heart-shaped cookies. He reaches for the cookie. Still chewing, he sizes her over with his eyes. "See, Anechka, I got you a pretty sweet life," he says as he licks the sugar off his fingers. "Just stick to the

list next time, and it will only get sweeter."

Anna gets behind the kitchen counter. She starts chopping onions, carrots, parsley, and sweet potatoes. She remembers the little bag of chips she hid in the glove compartment. On Saturday, when he's gone, she will sit on the couch in pajama pants, watch Golden Girls and devour Sweet Maui Onion chips.

None of that is on the list.

# Girls Grow Faster

Marcus Ethan Estrada

Maddie and I were always the last to leave middle school. My mom could only pick me up after she got off work, while Maddie waited for a bright purple sports car. It had dark tinted windows, and its engine growled like a monster to call her over. I only saw its inside in flashes when Maddie opened the door to get in. It had a dirty, blood-red interior. We sat on a bench that was always wet, with moss and settled rain droplets cushioning our backs. We didn't mind the cold and glossy afternoons. They were fresh.

Today she was chewing on the plastic tip of one of her hoodie drawstrings, and I was rolling the pitiful stem of a weed between my thumb and forefinger. It was a yellow dandelion, slick leaves still attached. Maddie peeked over, plastic tip still in her mouth like a ruminant chewing on cud, and I quickly hid away my flower. A rush of blood coursed through my body, I think I was blushing.

Lately, she had been wearing bright, flamboyant, revealing clothes, like hot crop tops and fishnets. She'd gotten in trouble for it before, but the adults just punished her and left it at that. That day, however, she wore her dull, dark, navy blue hoodie. It had the logo of the city aquarium fading away and breaking into tiger-like lines. It neutralized the curves of her body, veiling any hint of an hourglass figure in a mass of thick cloth. I really liked her hoodie.

"Hey." My voice broke immediately. "Do you wanna hang out sometime? Like, outside of school, I mean. I have some movie tickets, and my friends ditched me, so if you wanna come along, that's cool. But if you don't want that, I also have a coupon for the arcade, there's laser tag and, well, you probably already know what's at an arcade. I also—"

"Whoa, slow your biscuits, dude." The drawstring hung on her lip. Her voice had deepened, while mine was still clinging onto childhood, so really our voices were very similar. It was one of those things that pulled boys and girls together at that age, when it was inevitable that we be separated by a vast and unknowable sea. Already, our friendship was unusual. She was smiling slightly, almost imperceptibly, like the whistle of the wind lapping at our cheeks. She must have known that would

comfort me, she'd done that exact smile a few times. "Breathe out, then get it out." She spoke like a teacher.

"Yeah, ok." My heart could not find its resting place as I took in a cold, stinging breath. "Do you wanna hang out?"

Her soft face was pulled taut into a grating angularity. Her eyes narrowed like prey looking at what could be a predator in the distance. Her neck tensed up—it had been a while since I saw it without a choker. "I don't think you just wanna 'hang out.'"

I waved my arm flippantly, trying to dismiss her notion to the harsh air. "What? No!"

She let the string drop from her mouth as she let out a giggle. A gust of wind blew by, and strands of hay-tangled hair framed her face perfectly. Her smile accentuated the dark circles under her eyes. She was always a bit sleepy. My grandma told me to smile with my eyes, but I don't think Maddie ever did that. I hoped I could see her do it sometime. "I know boys. I know what you think of girls." She was playing around with those words, rocking her head playfully, but I sensed that she was accusing me. Well, that was fair.

I dared to venture, "Would you like to get together?"

Maddie laughed a sandpapery, forced gust of air from her lungs. She had a raspy voice. She once told me that her throat was always sore. "Maybe some other time. But you wouldn't know how to date someone like other guys have dated me."

I was too young and dumb to know not to pry. I was too stupid to know that digging deeper on things like this would just disappoint me more than anything, and that you should never do it. But in my indignation (I learned that word from language arts class recently), I asked a question I shouldn't have asked: "How have other guys dated you? I might be able to do that! You don't know."

"Mm." She put her drawstring back in her mouth. "Can you drive? Can you take me places where we can be alone? Or will you have to ask your mommy to drive you around like a baby?"

"You date guys that can drive?"

Either she ignored my question, or really wanted to hammer in what exactly I was up against. She was leaning into me, like she wanted to talk fire right into my face. She smelled like hot breath, the salty scum of the gym floor, cold milk from a carton, and gaudy perfume. I think she was taking some sort of pleasure in it. One of her eyelids had a maddening



fold in it while the other looked serene. “How much money can you spend on me? Do you have a job?”

“I have an allowance.”

“Can you get mixers? I like strawberry pineapple ones.”

“What’s a mixer?”

“Alcohol. Can you get me alcohol?” She said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“I have soda at my house.”

“Do you live alone? Can I stay overnight without it being awkward for your family?”

I tried to picture her sitting in my house and among my family members. I wondered what my mom or dad would say to her, and if it would put her off and ruin things somehow. I also tried to imagine her sitting on my bed at night, but that was too much for me. I couldn’t go on thinking without my chest crumpling into itself. I swallowed and tried to look at her again, but found myself unable. Every time my eyes moved to the edge of her shape, I felt that I was somehow unworthy. That my sight would, in one way or another, violate. I figured that this must have been what Moses felt when he refused to look at the burning bush. I put my gaze slightly above her. “Maybe.”

“No, not ‘maybe.’ It’s ‘no.’”

“Fine. No.” I crossed my arms. “I guess we aren’t dating, then. You could’ve just said that.”

We sat there in silence. I didn’t say anything because I was a bit mad at her. Why she decided to remain silent, I don’t know. The darkness under her eyes deepened, despite her not smiling at all. It could’ve been that she had a desperate need to talk about what she had been through and what her standards were. That may have been the pleasure she was taking out of it.

Finally, she let out a small, breathy laugh. My heart was relieved and uplifted, I was happy to hear it. “You’re such a baby. If you were one of my other friends, you’d say, ‘You’re a slut!’ and laugh. You might even say, ‘You’re a victim!’” She sucked in some air, swallowed, and let a haggard breath out, like one would while crying. But then she smiled, small wrinkles at the corners of her eyes forming. “Maybe that’s why I like talking to you. You couldn’t even think like that.”

I leaned and wiggled into the bench, and the warmth was sucked from my back. I saw a squirrel climbing up a lamp post across the road. I

thought that little critter mistook it for just a strange kind of tree.

“You said that we might date another time?”

“I dunno. Maybe you can date someone like me when you’re older. When you can do all those things.”

“I think I’d be into college girls at that point.”

“You’d be surprised, dude.”

We had another awkward silence. An inkling of what was going on broke into my mind at that point, but it was one of those things that a kid sort of just accepts. Kids are strong like that. They’re weak like that as well.

Her string fell out of her mouth again. “We can still be friends.” She put a hand on my arm. It was cold and clammy. “I’d like that, honestly. We can keep it pure. I want that. A girl needs at least one pure place in the world.”

I had no idea what she was talking about. She was looking at me, but her mind seemed to be far away. Maybe somewhere warm, where she was snuggled up in an armchair around a fireplace. She’d be in her pajamas or her underwear, comfortably alone, her body shielded with a tightly held blanket. Her eyes were drifting away from me. “Sure,” I said. “I think I’d be ok with being just friends.”

“Just...”

The drone of a familiar sports car engine in some unseen distance reached our ears. I sensed that something was deeply wrong whenever I saw her get in that car, and yet I was glad whenever I saw her do it: I’d rather be there till the last second, almost like I was holding her hand, than leave before her and know she would face waiting and getting in alone. Her lip quivered, like she mourned leaving her warm place. She started chewing on her drawstring again.

“Hey, are you gonna wear that hoodie tomorrow?”

“No. Why?”

“I really like it. I think it looks better than stuff like fishnets.”

She looked me up and down and sighed. Like something was wrong with me. “You gotta learn to love skin, dude.”

“I like skin. I don’t love it. I can’t have a crush on it. I don’t even know if I really like skin.”

“That’s a problem. You have to. You can’t take it away from this kind of love.”

I felt like I was fighting not only her, but an unstoppable force behind

her. It was like being swept away by vast crashing waters, and having only an impotent body to fight it. "I think we can."

"No, you can't. And it's weird and backwards to even try to go back to something like that."



*Reflection* • Rosa Christen  
oil on paper

# The Meat Tenders

Isaac Humphrey

They don't play music in the cutting room anymore. Just the hum of the overhead lights and the wet slap of flesh on metal, which I guess is a kind of music itself if you listen long enough. If you've been here long enough. We used to have a radio, but someone dropped it in the gut bin and no one bothered to replace it. Somehow, the smell of bleach is worse without something to drown it out. That's what this place does. Jumbles up all the senses until nothing makes sense.

Now, you can hear your own breath, your own stomach shifting. You can hear yourself thinking, which is the worst part.

I've been here for almost two years. It was supposed to just be two months. During the summer. Temporary. That's how all these things start, isn't it? You never can hold onto the things you want to, yet the things you don't want never let go of you. I'm sorry. I don't mean to assume your life is dismal and dingy and rank with guts too. But I think you may know what I mean, no matter what you do.

They start us out on chicken. Then pigs. Then beef. I don't eat meat anymore, but I still crave it sometimes. The way an addict does a fix. It's usually after I leave. It's like my body knows it's been elbow-deep in something it used to be part of. Like it wants back in.

Or I don't know, maybe it's just my body hungry for protein. I don't have a very stable stomach anymore, not after working at the meat plant for so long. The best I can usually do is saltines and vodka. Which is convenient only for my bank account. But that's convenient for my savings account, which is convenient for the \$7,302 I need for top surgery. My insurance, after a long and lengthy battle of getting them to pay anything at all, will only put up a grand after I put up the rest. Which I guess is better than nothing. But I'd really love to read a breaking news headline about a few of them, if you know what I mean.

I keep a picture of my tits in my locker. Well, it's a shirtless picture of me. My face is in it too and everything from the navel up. It's an old picture. From just before I started working here. The summer after I got that degree everybody swore would take me places.

Yeah, right.

But I keep the picture here, in my little dented blue locker, to remind myself not to quit yet. And I don't mean to sound ungrateful. The job isn't all that bad. It's not a retail job, for one. No customers. Some of my coworkers are assholes but mostly the type that just like to talk. On and on and on. I hate talking. So, since we're not competing for air time, we're usually able to survive a shift without pushing each other into one of the massive meat grinders that transforms chicks into nuggets. Don't worry, we get used to the screaming here.

Wednesdays are usually the quietest days. And the slowest. It's when we process veal. Nobody—not even Guthrie—talks on veal days. I think the entire plant could be engulfed in flames and we'd only tell each other through mime work.

There's just something about the weight of it, you know? Or the weight of them, rather. The calves. They call them vealers. We take them just after their mothers wean them. Around seven or eight months old. That's when they graduate from cute lifeforms to luxury dinners.

The spines are fragile. You can snap them without too much pressure, and most workers do, even though we're told to be careful. Even if we are careful. At least along the lines of how we define care.

One of the women, Shelia, keeps a little notebook tucked into the pocket of her white coat. She writes something in it every break, the page edges dusted with blood. I asked once what it was for. Something about her reminds me of my mother, so she's easy to talk to but only in small amounts on rare occasions. She told me she was making a list of things that humans should pay for one day.

"Pay who?" I asked.

But she only tapped the tip of her nose. Not to indicate herself, but something she believed in. Something she knew. Something she thought I knew.

I don't know. I told you she reminds me of my mother. And my mother is insane.

That night, after veal day, I dreamed I pulled back the hide of a calf and saw a human face under it. It wasn't dead. The human. Actually, now that I think about it, the vealer might not have been either. None of us screamed. We all just blinked. Surprised but too desensitized to surprising shit to react much.

I was thinking about this a few days later. I guess it lingered on my mind for a while. So much so that Mr. Corey, the plant foreman, made me

take a drug test. I guess I seemed out of it. Loopy. Or he could have just wanted my piss. I never saw any evidence that the bottle was shipped off anyway. And I wasn't fired for having cocaine in my system.

He has a limp and calls me "kid." I guess it's better than "baby," which is what he calls the women. Even the most rebellious women here wear their white coats when he comes onto the floor. Buttoned as far up as it will go. Too baggy to reveal anything, not even a shape beyond sheathed rectangle.

When I first started working here, he was impressed. He said I had the cleanest cuts he'd seen in years. He said I must've done this before. I hadn't. I couldn't even tell you the last time I touched a dead animal before starting here. But I think there's just something about being trans that makes you good at slicing things open. We learn early how to separate what people see from what we are. Maybe that's a kind of talent.

Last week I started noticing the meat changing. At first I thought it was just the lighting. A pinkish tint, maybe, or a strange marbling in the fat. But then I cut into a flank and it shuddered. Just once, like a breath. I didn't tell anyone. We don't get sick days here. We get replaced. It's far from a glorious job, but it's a job in a small, dying county that pays a dollar more an hour than Walmart. There's always someone else in line.

They just hired some more people a few days ago. Three. Two women, 30–40, and a guy, 19 or 20, maybe. Brandon. I don't know him, but I hate his name. A guy I grew up with named Brandon used to bully me. Called me a dyke, which hurt in the South back then. Which wasn't too long ago. Then a faggot, which turned me on. He wrapped his Mustang around an oak tree two years after we graduated high school, and everybody on Facebook had something nice to say. Even Elaine Shutter, whose daughter got it worse from Dead Brandon and killed herself at sixteen.

Alive Brandon watches me when he thinks I'm not looking. He smells like formaldehyde. Which is fitting, because he looks like a corpse. So pale he's gray. Shaved head. Shitty tattoos. A rose over his eyebrow. A moon beneath the opposite eye. Others on his arm. Homemade. In a kitchen, probably. He might be related to the girl I get my coke from. They have the same sunken cheeks and hawk noses. Sexy, in that transgressive way.

I watched him lift a slab of pork and whisper something to it before dropping it on the belt with a wet flop. I thought I heard it whisper back.

I'm starting to think the meat remembers. Not who it was, but who it could have been. There's something embryonic in the way it clings to the

blade. Like it's still waiting to finish becoming.

My apartment smells like ammonia. It's an old apartment. In a building left over from when this county was something else. Something better, or so they say. I don't think there's anyone here who's old enough to know if Something Better is anything more than an urban legend. I thought the ammonia would take some of the yellow off of the things that used to be white—the kitchen floor, the refrigerator, the useless landline phone still attached to the wall, the bathtub. Why do these homey things have such a tendency to age like bone?

Three months ago, I was bleaching my hair and almost killed myself. Not on purpose. I just didn't think hair bleach was the same as cleaning bleach. I didn't think it would react with the ammonia in the same way. A bit of my lungs were burned from the chlorine gas. But scars don't count unless you can see them, right?

After that I turned my cleaning attention to other things. I showered three times a day until my skin started peeling. Now I just wash my hands until they bleed. I washed my sheets until they were loose threads. Now the mattress is bare and there's a stain on it shaped like a spine. I pretend it belongs to someone else.

On my days off I take the bus to nowhere. Or nowhere in particular. I have a car, but that's not the point. I want to see people. To exist, however briefly, in different worlds. The worlds of different people. I'm always so curious what they're like. I see a man on the bus Saturday mornings who wears a suit two sizes too big. He stares at his reflection in the window and mouths words I can't hear. One day I followed him off the bus. He went into the woods behind the Piggly Wiggly. I waited twenty minutes, but he never came back out.

The locker room started to smell sweet last week. Like fruit rotting. No one mentioned it.

Later I caught my reflection in the meat hook. It was new. Shiny. Apparently, the plant had gotten some grant. My face was longer than I remembered. My teeth, too. I opened my mouth wide. Wide enough to see all my teeth. I became convinced Nate's semen was stained on the back of my tongue, the back of my throat. I closed my mouth.

There's a dog that waits outside the plant every night. Her nipples are leaden with milk, sagging like an udder. I think she thinks we stole her puppies. She's part husky, so I'm sure her owners just sold them. One night she waited until I came out, then followed me to my car.



I thought about it for a minute, then opened the passenger door but she didn't move.

"You don't want to leave?"

She yawned.

So now I spend my smoke breaks with her, which is when I snort a line behind the containers where we put the bones that get shipped off to one of the few rendering facilities left in the state. Soon they'll become Jell-O shots at the type of parties I used to go to. I talk to the dog about the ribs that look like fingers. About the calves with human teeth. About the hunger that's growing under my skin.

One night I said, "Do I look different?"

She tilted her head.

There used to be a girl here I knew from high school. Samira. She was three years younger but we lost our virginity to the same guy, who was six years older than me. I guess he should be behind bars. Instead, he's behind a pulpit now. She quit after she found a tooth in a cut of sirloin. She said it looked human. She told me once, before, that she didn't believe in souls, just muscle memory. That maybe the body keeps trying to go back to whatever it was last. I think about her when I can't sleep. I wonder what she's turning into. I wish I would have asked for the tooth.

My chest itches all the time. Not the skin. Deeper. Like something under it is trying to move. I pressed on it in the shower and felt something shift. Not bone. Not muscle. Not fat. Something else. I stopped looking in mirrors.

Alive Brandon came up to me after the last shift and asked, "You know what you are yet?"

I said no. He's crazy, too.

He smiled and said, "Soon."

That night I dreamed I was hanging from the meat hook, but I wasn't afraid. I felt clean. Stripped. Ready.

This morning I stood in front of my locker with the picture in my hand. I turned it over, then back again. My face looked younger, or maybe just dumber. I put it in my mouth and chewed slowly. I tasted like ink and salt.

On the floor, Brandon nods at me like he's been waiting. Like he *knows* something. I don't think he ever blinks. I don't think I do either, anymore.

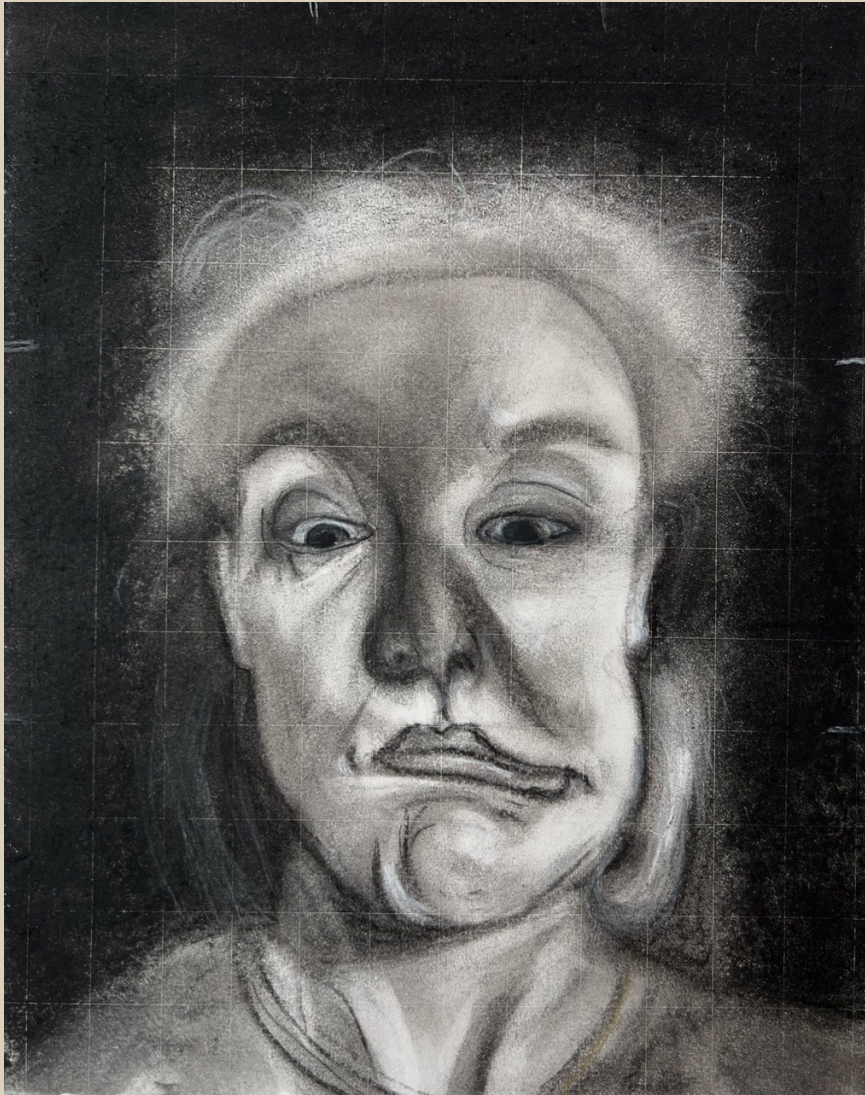
I slice into the next cut and it sighs. Not a breath. A *sigh*. Soft. Resigned. Like it had been waiting, too.

Like it knows I finally know.

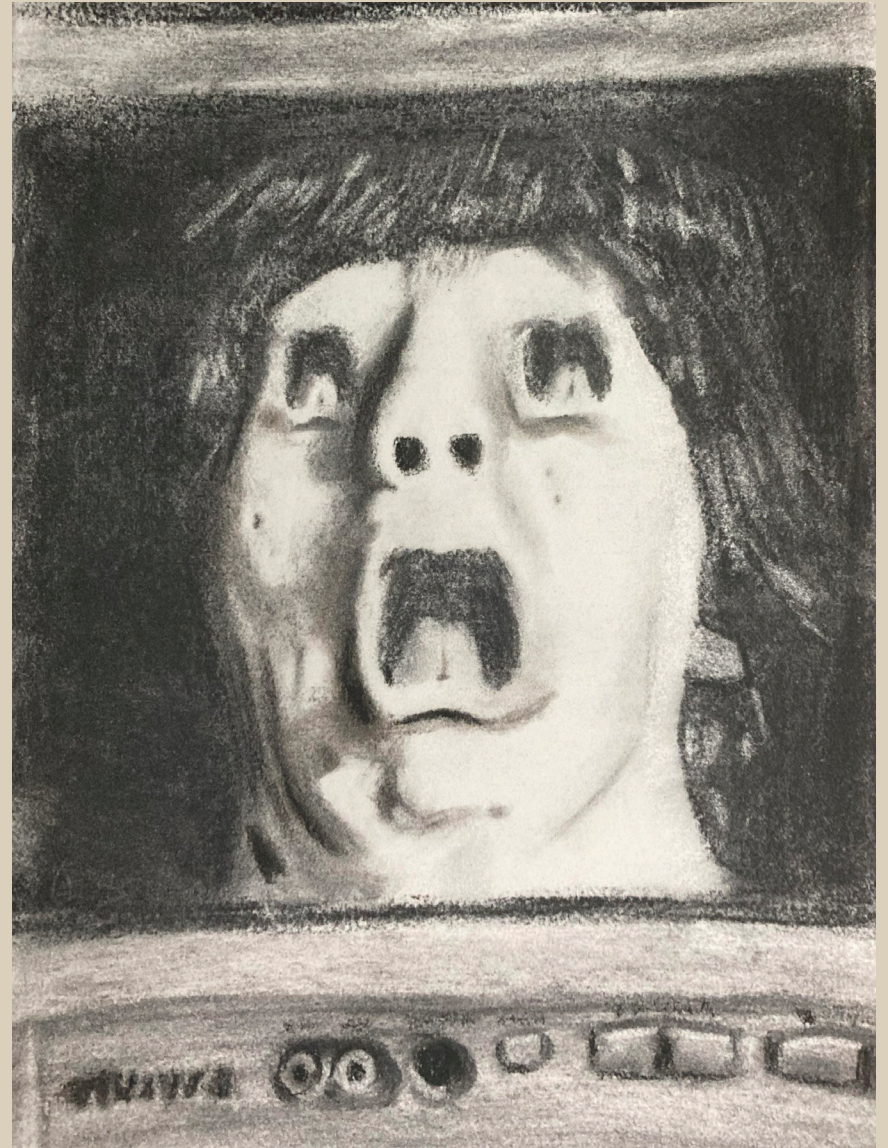
*I'm alive!* it says.

"Yeah," I reply. "Me too."





*Menopause* • Erica Schroeder  
charcoal on paper



*Off Air* • Benjamin Welsh  
charcoal on paper



# Apex

Katelyn Pike

Jessie Carmichael already resented her second life as a songbird. As painful and humiliating as the last moments of her first life had proven, she'd figured its end might have at the very least granted her some respite, perhaps some dignity. Instead, in the same second as Jessie's human body died in a sickle shape of spine bones and bruises, she'd found herself reborn into a bird body scrunched up into nearly the same position: skin scaly-naked, knees pressed tightly to her chest. This was not heaven. This was the cramped confines of the egg.

The voice of the Designer had interrupted her panic to assure her that the discomfort she felt stuffed into the eggshell was temporary, just as her old life—and death—had been. Only the thinnest membrane separates you from your past life and your future, he declared. Soon enough, you'll hatch into your new existence as a golden-winged warbler! The Designer seemed particularly pleased to note that the warbler was a native to the very woods Human Jessie had admired so much in her former life. He promised that once Bird Jessie emerged from the egg, she'd be thrilled with the form he'd chosen for her. He'd really made her something special, he said. Wait until she took a gander at that feather color! She'd be a miracle of tiny wings and little feet, free to soar into the blue or sing his praises to the treetops.

Fuck that, Jessie said, though her profanity was largely muffled by the eggshell. It seemed the Designer had made many decisions at the exact moment of Jessie's death. The man who'd killed her had made choices, too. But had either of them thought to ask Jessie what she thought of their plans for her, she certainly would have requested she be remade into something higher on the food chain, something dangerous, a creature powerful enough to slice and claw her killer open from slack jaw to unbuttoned trousers with one swipe of its paw. As a songbird she'd have a heart that thrummed too fast in her chest, a pulse higher than a human's even at rest, and while the Designer promised her now that she would not remember the pain of her old life or the violence of her murder once the egg cracked open to begin the new one, Egg Jessie could not imagine any world in which little Bird Jessie's racing heart would not

harken back to how Human Jessie's had pounded in the moment she was attacked ten feet off the Appalachian Trail, her running shorts bunched down around her ankles, her ponytail yanked back. Had Egg Jessie been able to properly speak, had she been able to properly swear, she'd have pointed out to the Designer that flight had not been an adequate enough defense for her last time, so why try it again now? She wanted nothing so demure and nurturing as nesting instincts and pollination. No, Egg Jessie yearned for gnashing fangs, poisonous barbs, vicious talons. She wanted spines or scales or needles. Make her a black bear, bobcat, a copperhead, for God's sake. Had she been permitted an opinion, she'd have demanded a body to fight back with, a body apex predator. She'd commanded the Designer grant her a body like he'd once imagined for himself when he came down to Earth, or isn't that what she'd been taught in Sunday school all those hot Virginia summers, Mr. Omnipresent?

Egg Jessie tried to communicate all this to the Designer but found that the walls of the egg kept even her own thoughts imprisoned. Furious to the point of hard boiling, she pried open her beak to try another fuck you, but in doing so, punctured the eggshell. Now the egg was cracking, and Egg Jessie's questions—her thoughts, her opinions, her opposition—became no more than twittering, no more than a kind of song, when that first dagger of light stabbed inside the bird's egg. The shell broke open, and all the rest of it—of the woman Jessie Carmichael—was gone, replaced by this thing with feathers, fragile enough to hold—or crush—in the palm of one man's hand.

For a moment, after, the world held still with springtime. Squirrel chatter, wind, and sunlight filtered through the overstory of the peaceful forest. Then, under her new mother's watchful eye, Bird Jessie hopped and tottered along to the edge of the nest and peeked over the edge at the forest floor. Mama Bird had tucked their nest away in the branches high above the Trail, but if Bird Jessie cocked her pink, featherless head to one side, she could spy a crumpled human body far below, and the assailant who stood beside that lifeless heap, brushing himself off, pulling his clothes back on. But the sight did not alarm Bird Jessie, at least not anymore. Through a golden-winged warbler's eyes this encounter seemed only to be a matter of the birds and bees, the natural cycles of life and death. They were a pair of mates, one male, one female.

One predator, one prey.



*Lifecycle* • Riley Darr  
intaglio, ink on paper

## Anadromous

Zach Keali'i Murphy

Elliott crouches atop a jagged rock on the shore of the river, spine contorting like a tree branch, skin wrinkled like a fallen fig, his weathered eyes squinting at a run of salmon as they swim upstream and launch their slippery bodies toward a crashing waterfall. He admires their ceaseless tenacity, their magnificent hearts, their silver scales glistening in the sunlight. The frigid wind whips through his beard, the color of sand, as the river water splashes his freckled cheeks. His dark blue veins are a map of where he's been, where he's going, and where he went wrong. Mosquito bites and scratch marks paint his arms and legs, but he feels alive. So alive. He takes a deep breath, lunges into the river, and submerges his head beneath the ice-cold water. He looks around and sees stones that have known the river longer than him. He sees his mother's green eyes in the floating bubbles. He hears his father's angry roar amidst the rushing water. He hears the silence of the son he always dreamt about but never had. He ascends back up through the river's surface and exhales everything he'd kept locked up in his brain and in his bones. His salty tears disappear into his soaked skin. He smiles the widest smile he's ever smiled. His teeth—abandoned shells. The river feels like home. Like home. The salmon swim past him in a frenzy. He looks toward the waterfall and follows behind them, his magnificent heart leaping from his chest.



# Let's Get it Together, Ok?

Ryan Mattern

There was a hole in my chest, I noticed, one morning after getting out of the shower. I had pretty crappy health insurance, and the last time I went to the clinic around the corner from my apartment to get something for this sinister headache I got out of nowhere, the power went out and the staff told me and the woman with a screaming baby swathed against her chest and this man clutching a bandana to his eye to all go home. So, I just covered it with a bandage like I did with spackle and paint on the wall after I got angry and threw that beer bottle. People are a lot like walls but at the end of the day people are not walls at all. Soft things, invisible things, can cut right through us.

It didn't really hurt the way you'd think it might. It just sort of nagged at me, like an embarrassing memory or a bill I've forgotten to pay. My best friend from college—who was doing a lot of mushrooms and getting paid a lot of money to facilitate psychosynthesis workshops in Big Sur—sent me a text sandwiched between pictures of the Pacific Ocean buffeted by cypress and agave-strewn rocks and beautiful women in expensive hats: *maybe it's a metaphor...maybe there's something you're not doing.*

I suppose there were a lot of things I wasn't doing. Even though I was still a relatively young man, according to my parents and the Internet, I still had this inexplicable sense that I had entered the end times. I don't know where it came from, or if maybe everyone has this feeling at some point, that when you give yourself over to routine, the dreams you once had start to feel outlandish and cringeworthy. But it was my life, after all, and the hole gave me a sudden impetus to truly start living it, whatever that looked like.

I liked music and used to play guitar, so I thought maybe I could start a band and be a rock star. But by the time I got good enough at guitar, all the girls just wanted computers. Then, I decided that what I lacked was companionship, so I bought a dog, but he ran away. So, I bought another dog, but she was big and died young and the hole grew to the size of a half dollar. So, I bought a cat. But now he won't come out from behind the refrigerator.

A coworker suggested yoga, so I took a class with her. It was fun and at

a bar afterward she asked if I wanted to keep drinking at her place, but I said No, thanks, I've got this thing I'm dealing with. But she said, come on and so I did and doing it made me feel a little better. We did it a few more times and I really did enjoy it quite a lot. But the hole kept getting bigger and by then my shirts started fitting me weird. The hole was pretty embarrassing, too, so I stopped answering her calls and took to wearing two sweaters. She refused to look at me when I walked past her cubicle to the water dispenser. I believe she started spreading rumors about me too because people started talking to me less and, sometimes, they would get really quiet if I got on the elevator with them. Eventually, I had to stop showing up for work altogether.

After a few months I heard a voice, though it was more like a sensation I was suddenly overcome by.

It said, *Let's get it together, ok?*

And I was like, *Yeah, ok.*

I read on this blog that people were starting to hire life coaches to help them navigate all the complexities of living. I found an agency that promised genuine fulfillment and a money-back guarantee. I had to fill out a questionnaire, some of which should have put me off from the start—*do you prefer the company of your own race, and have you ever fantasized about an animal sexually?* But the hole was growing, and I was starting to have a hard time falling asleep, kept up by the thoughts of what would happen if the hole reached my face.

The first life coach was a little too gruff and smoked cigarettes and talked endlessly about illegal labor. The second was so soft-spoken I could barely make out what he was saying. The third's sole mission was to get me laid but he never delivered and the fourth spent twelve hours a day on this fantasy role playing game online. I never met the fifth in person, though we did have some good conversations via text. When I said I thought I was a unique case that required a hands-on approach, they stopped responding. The first thing the sixth life coach told me was not to fall in love with her, but I did for like six months, and it got really expensive and sad for me. Then, once I felt ready, I moved onto the seventh. She had a five-year-old that followed her around swearing and refusing to eat anything but macaroni and cheese.

The eighth, however, seemed like a pretty normal guy.

He took me bowling on our first outing and suggested we play with the bumpers up because, he said, everyone deserves one once in a while.

Afterward, we split a pitcher of beer to celebrate my victory and then a half-pint of whiskey in the parking lot of the 7-11 just because.

I think I really needed this, I told him. This feels good.

We were leaning against the trunk of his car passing the bottle back and forth and birdying. A cop car pulled into the parking lot, and he stuffed the bottle in his back pocket. The cop eyed us, flipped on his sirens and pulled onto the road before speeding off into the night.

I guess I've really been fucking up lately. Is it still lately if it's been like ten years?

I think I know what your problem is.

You do?

Yeah, I think I do. I think you're looking for someone to pat you on the back, to reassure you you're living your life. And you think you're unique in that you're not getting it. But listen, no one's getting it. You're not so special—and I mean that as a friend. We're all just blowing around acting like we know something we don't. We don't know anything, not what was before, only what they told us, and not what after, only what they tell us. You have to let it go.

It can't be that easy.

Then he made a face that suggested he possessed the deathblow to our tête-à-tête. He unbuttoned his shirt and showed me a scar on his chest the size of a grapefruit. It looked fake, like something you'd see in a B-rated horror movie. I stood there staring at it until it got awkward, and he buttoned up his shirt again. He finished the whiskey and chucked the bottle into the street. It shattered, satisfyingly, into thousands of pieces.

But go on thinking you're right and that you're helpless, he said. I get paid either way.



*The Man Who Lost His Face* • Cecile Gonneau  
graphite on paper

# Pumpkin

Lianne Craig

When Max arrives at the farm, it resembles a ghost town. This is what they had hoped for, hence the weekday visit, yet there is something disturbing in the emptiness.

*Odd for the middle of October.* Max steps out of the car hesitantly, spotting only one person in a distant field. The sky looks ominous and dark, but it's not supposed to rain today.

After a slew of text invitations sat unreturned, they had decided to come alone. The depressive nature of unemployment and the lack of Halloween spirit at home had turned them into a restless and irritable creature.

They creep towards the pumpkin patch, noticing the crunch of their shoes against gravel. It feels eerily loud in the quiet that surrounds them.

As they move into the soft soil and take larger steps across the vines, they begin to understand the feeling of dread they're carrying. Almost every pumpkin is broken, smashed by a foreign object. Left behind to rot.

The visit becomes another fruitless search for one undamaged enough to love, to display, to destroy on their own terms.

Max considers walking back to the farm store—surely a stack of whole, happy pumpkins awaits them there. They shake their head, dismissing the idea, and continue walking.

A few seem unscathed, only to have a deep crater on the opposite surface. Another person appears briefly, looking defeated as well. They shrug and sigh in each other's direction.

Last year, the annual visit to the pumpkin patch looked very different. Max and Riley had been dating for a few months then. The new relationship energy shone a warm light on every moment they spent together. When Riley found her pumpkin, a goofily tall specimen with a short stem, she claimed that it looked like Max.

"I cannot wait to cut into this bad boy." She smiled affectionately at the blank orange canvas. Max smiled affectionately at her.

Forcing their way out of the memory, Max continues to search the field. They check countless pumpkins before finally finding one. On the smaller side, it is dramatically asymmetrical, with a comically large stem

and a rough curl cascading down the length of the body. *Strange enough to be left alone, I suppose.* They gently rub off the dirt caked onto its surface.

For a moment, the two rest together on the soft ground. The pumpkin fits comfortably within Max's crossed legs.



*Manzanita Sunset* • Carrie Tilton-Jones  
acrylic on canvas





*The Last One Left* • Qin Tan  
digital



*Snake and Tree* • Qin Tan  
digital



*Mirabelle* • Kannikar Petersen  
acrylic on canvas



*The Red Robe* • Claudia McNellis  
acrylic on paper

# NONFICTION

---





# Coming to Terms With Place

Mae Mae Rattler

I grew up in California from the day I was born up to when I turned ten, which was when my mom moved me to Oregon. Though I've spent eight years of my life here, I've always known where my home is—and here definitely doesn't feel like a home to me. While at first little me was excited to move, I soon realized where my heart resided—and that will always be back on the beach with my family. It was warm but never too warm, and the sun was always perfect with a cool breeze—just enough to even everything out.

My eyes felt blinded by the shimmer that would come from the waves rolling in, – I couldn't look away. My mother always told me to never turn my back to the ocean, so I almost never did. I let my eyes focus in on the gleam and the big waves that would come and go. I placed my heart in that water, and I still feel it there.

I remember playing in the ocean that was the perfect temperature while I found jellyfish on the shore. They were small, weird and goopy—nothing like how they looked in videos. I would keep my eyes on my feet and feel how I sank into the sand whenever the waves would wash over. I would stay here until my mother or my father told me to come back for cream cheese and cucumber sandwiches, or until I was swept under by a wave when I was too focused on how the sand melted over my feet and trapped me.

I will never forget how it feels having saltwater in my nose and eyes. I would always cry and run back to my family. That was the only time I would turn my back to the ocean. Whether the beach day was spent with my mom and grandma or with my dad, it would always end the same way: tired little me walking to the car, then sitting down and waiting for my mom or my dad to brush the sand off of my legs. This is a particular feeling I have never forgotten. I remember how it would scrape against my skin when my dad would quickly swipe all the small rocks off of my legs, my feet, my arms, and then my hands. I complained at first, but later I got used to it and found the slight pain comforting. My mom tried to be more gentle, but no matter how it was done, it felt the same. As I grow older, I miss those times—but I've found myself in someone else.

I took my baby sister Kumi to the beach for her first time while visiting my dad back home. I cried as I wiped the sand off of her legs, feet, arms, and then hands. I looked at her and saw myself. I had never felt more at home.



*Space Ring* • Ryan Gregory  
ceramic

# Once a Marine

Matt Eidson

The night I told my new friends about *that* day in Afghanistan, I cried in public. One cried with me, another asked *how can we help?*, and another stared, deadpan. I fidgeted with my KIA bracelets and said *I'm sorry, I'm sorry*. None of them call or text me anymore.



*Untitled* • Atzimba Alfaro  
gouache, ink and gel pen on paper

# To Terese

J. Artemis Mackay

Jan. 17, 2025, at 9:32 a.m.

88 **T**he stakeout is in its seventh week. I send Victor<sup>1</sup> a picture. I turn clockwise from my writing desk, quarter turn, to see the hotel valet through my segmented windows. The glass makes them ghostly, the past made present. My own face, a different name affixed. The light shifts and it's gone. The lower pane is a perfect angle. As a bit of social science, I'd started taking photos of massive SUVs and trucks that pull up. This one is special: a dark grey pickup, raised on standard-size wheels with a massive front tow hitch. A rottweiler dog muzzle on the mouth of a malformed beast. On tip toes, rests a pup tent attachment atop the bed. Only a pole vaulter could enter from outside. I ask Victor<sup>2</sup> to eyeball an estimate. With fancy options, he says, fifty thousand dollars, maybe fifty-five. The chrome muzzle is at least three thousand on its own.

Like most of its kin, the truck *gleams* the way dealer cars do—kept away from gravel and mud. Bombastic lighting radiates from the hotel, conjuring classic car auctions on late-night cable channels. I can only be startled by it again and again, in a city of rain and grime. Rentals from the airport are common, alongside wealthy suburbanites infiltrating to watch the Blazers. When I was a sociology student, they called this rigamarole *peacocking*. Arrive, roll the walkway, strike a pose. I'll provide the close-up. *Click*.

I accumulate a dragon's hoard of photos. I see mirage Silverados when the valet stand lies empty on the cusp of dawn.

This is a story of a life in the city. I have to tell you this story because she cannot.

...

---

1 The only real name in this story is my own. Hi, I'm Artemis.

2 We met yelling at conservatives on an internet forum in 2006.

Terese was the first trans person I knew. She was high-school classmates with my sister. They dated for five years, came to Portland to enroll at Reed together, fell out, stayed friends. They possessed a breathtaking capacity to annoy one another. I went to the same high school a few years later, arriving the year after they left.

I'm sitting on the living room floor by the TV in my sister's purple house on the corner in Southeast. They're playing one of the role-playing games when a legal proceeding breaks out over whether a rule actually applies. The scene evokes the fracas of a Shakespeare table read where everyone forgets to bring the script along. Tender, eloquent, raucously funny. I was maybe seventeen. The social space brewed sweet, primordial chaos.

Terese practiced Japanese sword arts and relished experimental species of the Linux operating system. Anything that fails catastrophically creates a tricky puzzle in piecing together wreckage. Puzzles are fun! I was the younger brother,<sup>3</sup> charged with dual jobs of fawning over the big kids and their big kid stuff and of being immensely annoying. I succeeded.

...

Jan. 27, 2025, at 6:28 p.m.

Something's come to town. The window overlooks the hotel lobby as well. On certain weeks of the year there are clues. Light-up robot cosplays indicate Rose City Comic Con in September, early modern fashions with neon hair is Kumoricon in November. The queue throttles the street grid, blocking a bike lane. Bus drivers lean on their horns, unable to crowbar into a stop just past the hotel. While narrow, the street can fit a tall traveler bus with rideshares looping around. Every single truck *gleams*. I send Victor a video of a coal-black Ford pickup trying a seven-and-counting-point turn. The five orange omens lighting the windshield remind me of 737s cleared for landing at Portland International. Three tons of steel with heavy window tint. I look right past it even though it's in front of me. The aftermarket headlights cauterize the space directly ahead. Any other

---

3 Was

angle, it would cut through my peripheral vision going forty.

Vehicle fatalities in the United States peaked in the mid-1970s, spawning a social movement that catalyzed decades of safety improvements. Total pedestrian fatalities hit their all-time low in 2009 with 4,109 deaths. In 2022, it was 7,522—a difference greater than the number of people murdered on September 11th.<sup>4</sup> Cities sprawl, and American cars sprawl alongside them. Trucks in 2018 were 24% heavier than they had been in 2000, and considerably taller. Flatter grilles mean a cyclist doesn't roll; they take the full force at once. A 2019 study found a pickup is 159% more likely to kill a pedestrian than a small car going the same speed.<sup>5</sup>

A truck with a hood height of more than forty inches has a drastically higher rate of pedestrian fatalities.

Forty inches is the average height of an American four-year-old child.

...

I'm fourteen. My sister takes me out for lunch when she is back in town. She never just *does* these gestures, there's some kind of catch. After we order, she looks me dead in the eyes. "Do you know what transgender means?"

Terese was transitioning. My history with the margins of gender was Robin Williams in *Mrs. Doubtfire*. I knew nothing.

I'm sitting on a futon as my sister and Terese are doing a push-up contest, eventually both are in the recovery position lamenting why they ever did such a fucking thing.

When I met Terese, as she wanted to be met, I felt radiant sunshine in a city of rainstorms. Her eyes lit up. There was struggle, how is there ever not struggle? She brought into focus what she already possessed: an assertive humor, a love of silly bullshit. The informal motto of Reed College is "Communism, Atheism, Free Love." The campus in Southeast assembles the planet's finest bookish dorks. There was trans joy. There

4 IIHS-HLDI (2022). "Fatality Facts 2022: Pedestrians." <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/pedestrians>

5 Zipper, D. (2024, April 28). "The reckless policies that helped fill our streets with ridiculously large cars." *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/24139147/suvs-trucks-popularity-federal-policy-pollution>

still is. Walking near Holgate Avenue across from campus, the trees stretch their branches, beckoning a rainbow. The prelude to peace.

...

*Feb. 10, 2025, at 1:10 p.m.*

Coronavirus continues its assault on my sinuses. The project must continue. Stage front, a sea-green Dodge with aftermarket bed cover. Every surface *gleams*. Victor and I have taken to calling the immaculate truck beds "coke mirrors." Jacked up, like always. The twisting tow hitch like a jousting lance for a gallant knight. Each inch a medieval instrument of torture. The war rigs of *Mad Max* belch their bolt-and-piston violence. That can be enjoyable—movies are fun! The orchestra does not swell when the city bleeds. Below the banners lies honed steel.

Every year the trucks swell, their embellishments hefty to convey masculine authority. They are a sacrifice before the phallus through the funhouse reflection of American capitalism, boxed and commodified. In 2024, seven percent of auto loans were in default, the highest rate since the Great Recession.<sup>6</sup> The fashion runway, gleaming, becomes the undertow.

...

I take a photo of a *gleaming* white Jeep Wagoneer, shot-putting to Victor for a verdict.

**V:** And the Wagoneer is total shit. Every review says nothing works. (*Feb. 10, 2025, at 3:44 p.m.*)

I look up the specs: Dick Hannah will sell you a rock basic one for seventy-two thousand. Tricked-out option packages bump it to a hundred. Nothing works sans the messaging. Until recently, auto preference differed little by political ideology. Trucks became the focus of an intense marketing push with the rise of "Make America Great Again" in

6 Hyatt, D. (2024, February 6). Auto loan delinquencies hit 13-year high as monthly car payments get bigger. *Investopedia*. <https://www.investopedia.com/auto-loan-delinquencies-hit-13-year-high-as-monthly-payments-get-bigger-8559565>

2016. The hulking Jeep Wagoneer or Dodge Ram 2500 rapidly became cornerstones of right-wing consumption. The size has turned into an element of political terror. In the year after the death of George Floyd, drivers intentionally rammed automobiles into crowds of protestors 139 times.<sup>7</sup> The city is for people. The city bleeds.

...

The hotel valet gives me dysphoria. The slow stabbing sensation to the sternum. *Be conspicuous! Get in everybody's way! Have strangers gawk at your appearance!* I came out as non-binary to feel more comfortable in my body and the city I call home. Those hulks that roll the asphalt runway do drag stripped of all satire. I stare at my large hands and coarse body hair and ponder whether the wax place will make me feel more shame or less. Every wall there is Barbie pink, faded a half shade, its marketing a hymn to the vulva.

Portland requires a basic cooperative spirit to keep everyone safe and alive. The local government and the business alliance are adept bullshitters, but residents generally make the effort. I walked past a tent being thrown away by the city last week, watched by two patrolling security guards with Kevlar vests. Unauthorized camping. Everything pitched into a van, eventually into a dumpster.

...

Important people want to widen I-5 near my apartment. The Albina neighborhood was the largest Black community in Portland in 1950, with 14,000 residents.<sup>8</sup> The construction of a 99W extension, and later I-5, destroyed its housing stock. Instantly choked with traffic, the area atrophied into vestigial chunks. By 1970, there were only 5,000 residents. To accommodate cars, people must be expelled. The city bleeds people and replaces them with a symphony of smog and steel.

...

<sup>7</sup> Cox, S. (2022, August 4). "Three tons of fascism with a bull bar." *CounterPunch*. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2022/08/04/three-tons-of-fascism-with-a-bull-bar/>

<sup>8</sup> Cortright, J. (2021, March 22). "How ODOT destroyed Albina: The untold story." <https://cityobservatory.org/how-odot-destroyed-albina-the-untold-story/>

The last time I remember seeing Terese, she had come to my sister's house on Holgate, next to the Reed campus. I had graduated high school and was just turning nineteen. When she announced it was time for her to go home, I offered to walk her to the bus stop. Was I a bit infatuated? I see no reason to lie here. We waited for a while. She caught the bus heading east. I stood in the encroaching dark and the wind, the road ebbing west all the way to the Willamette, east to oblivion.

...

I came to Portland in 2022. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard serves as the main north-south surface street shadowing the Willamette's east bank. Cutting through the nerve center of Portland's Black community, most of the boulevard's pedestrian crossings are unlighted and unsignaled. Broad heritage trees fill the medians: pedestrians and cyclists are cloaked until two steps into the roadway. To call it an architecture of terror gives the urban mess too much intellectual credit.

...

When a decision is reached to discontinue life support, those who are young and recovered, in the physical sense, do not die quickly. It can take weeks. I sat with my sister when she got the call. That's the final meaningful memory I have in my childhood home. In the marked crosswalk at SE 80<sup>th</sup> and Foster Road<sup>9</sup> on November 1, 2009, at 7:25 p.m. Terese and her friend, Aisling, were killed by a Chevrolet Impala.

Terese counted in 2010 statistics, where cars killed sixty-two pedestrians in the state of Oregon.<sup>10</sup> In 2022, cars killed 137 pedestrians and cyclists in the state.<sup>11</sup>

The antihuman city. Last year, on the anniversary, I went to the scene.

<sup>9</sup> Beaven, S. (2009, November 4). "Neighbors say crossing at Foster and 80th is a dangerous one." *Oregonlive*. <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2009/11/woman-hit-while-crossing-south.html>

<sup>10</sup> Green, A. (2011, November 16). "Sober drivers rarely prosecuted in fatal pedestrian crashes in Oregon." *Oregonlive*. <https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2011/11/sober-drivers-rarely-prosecute.html>

<sup>11</sup> IIHS-HLDI (2022). "Fatality Facts 2022: State by state." <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/state-by-state>



I cried for someone who was important to me, for the many decades stolen. I cried at the small yellow lights they added to the crosswalk, still passed by SUVs and pickups doing the better part of forty coming off the highway. There's no stop sign; there's no signal. All things equal, the intersection has never been more dangerous. The Impala stopped being sold in 2020, as the market moved toward ever-bigger vehicles. Today, a stock Ford F-250 weighs a full ton more than a 2008 Impala—up to two tons more in its heavy-duty variants.

The streets join together in an asphalt neural network, lashed by a thousand decisions. Each point twists: who is the city for? Is the city for the living or for the machines given life through fossil fuels? Go to Foster and 80<sup>th</sup>, go to Division and 122<sup>nd</sup>. Notice “high crash intersection” signs nailed to utility poles as the river turns to wide-laned sprawl in East County. The city is for the machines. The machines make the city bleed.

...

Just before I came out in 2020, I thought about Terese. This community in Portland, almost two decades hence, braces for the long haul. This year centers and intensifies the social murder of trans people—an attempt to erase the very idea that we exist. Trans people are not on the path to second-class citizenship. We are now crafted into unpersons by tin-pot fascists, objects of fetish and revulsion. We owe a debt to those that came before us, came *out* before us. We are too fucking stubborn to die. I don't know if I ever would have come out without Terese. I live in the gracious world where that's a hypothetical.

I don't feel like a failed man these days; I feel like a success at something I'm still figuring out. That I'm going somewhere and that the journey is good in itself. Transition is crossing the threshold. We all do that sooner or later.

...

This year I finally gave up thinking I would get a replacement for my twenty-year-old Toyota Prius, scarred by New England road salt and a terrifying, grinding collision with a semi. In 2013, just over half of cars sold in America were SUVs and pickup trucks. A decade later, it was

eighty percent.<sup>12</sup> The used market is so much larger—the pressure is to buy big, buy bigger than whatever you have now. As the largest classes of automobiles get taller and heavier, those who normally buy sedans or hatchbacks armor up to survive a more violent crash. Pedestrians and cyclists cannot armor up as cars do. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard does not have a bike lane for much of its length. I'm scared to buy a bike, cars endemically weave into crosswalks and jump curbs in my neighborhood. Much of the city puts parking to the right of the bike lane; cars cut and leap out. When asked why the reverse is not done, providing shelter to cyclists, there is moaning on leaf removal costs.

I kept looking at larger and larger cars to find something I felt safe in. There is nothing that makes me feel safe, because it's not safe. To buy big is to make myself a danger to everyone else. My suburban upbringing tells me There Is No Alternative to buying an SUV. I live in a city now. The city is for people. Trucks don't tend to win collisions with light rail.

Terese was the same age as my older sister, so in my memory I drift to thinking she was much older when she was killed. Death feels less like extinction, more like *she's not here right now*. An eternal parallel present. When I looked up details last fall, I realized she was twenty-two. Eight years younger than when I came out. I was given the grace of time.

She didn't know me as I am today. I'm not the little brother. She didn't get to meet Artemis.

I didn't get to thank her.

**Feb. 13, 2025, at 9:19 a.m.**

---

12 Zipper (2024)



# Where My Childhood Lived

Princess Jillanne Sierra

“Ouch! Ouch!”

These were the words you’d hear from me every time darkness began to fall, along with my grandma’s voice echoing, “It’s getting late! Come home! Dinner’s ready!”—words that came with a pinch on the inner thighs that stung like a fire ant’s bite, the kind my grandma would give me and my brother. But it didn’t stop there—there was also our grandpa’s mad look as he said, “Do you know what time it is?” while sitting on the floor, watching TV and playing his favorite card game, solitaire.

I spent my childhood in the warmth of my grandpa and grandma’s home, surrounded by calm streets that felt as warm as my grandparents’ arms. Now, they’re just memories that return whenever I visit my childhood home.

I remember it so clearly—there were only a few houses back then. Everyone knew each other, like one big family. We didn’t need fences or locks. There were no crimes, no thieves, and no complaints. It was a street where people trusted one another.

Each morning, the chicken was our alarm clock and the chirping of birds was our background music. Smoke hung in the air with a sizzling aroma—earthy, garlicky, ocean-like—that stuck to the house all day and even to your clothes. I already knew what my grandma was cooking: fried eggplant, fried fish, and fried rice.

In the afternoon, if we didn’t take a nap, we weren’t allowed to play outside. So I would always pretend to be asleep. The moment I heard the theme song of a popular afternoon TV show, I’d let out a big yawn and rub my eyes, acting like I had just woken up—just so I could rush outside.

Now, every time I walk on that street where I grew up, it brings me back to those memories—how it used to look: the greenery, the brown soil, and the wide street, where we could run freely and safely. And the best part? Even though we lived in a tropical place, we barely felt the heat of the sun because the trees stood tall, giving us shade that kept us cool.

But as time went by, everything started to change.

The soil where we used to play turned into cement. Big trees were cut

down to make space for new houses. More people moved in—new faces, unfamiliar voices. It felt like a time-lapse. What was once a peaceful place slowly became crowded, noisy, and messy.

Houses now stand where trees used to grow. They’re packed together so tightly, it feels like there’s no space left to breathe anymore. The streets have become so narrow that the fruit trees and flowers, along with the peaceful air and natural beauty, disappeared. Now the air feels heavy—not just with dust and smoke, but with so much noise.

From morning until almost morning again, loud music blasts from both sides of my ears.

There’s always shouting, people laughing and drinking. There isn’t a day when neighbors aren’t arguing or fighting. The place where we used to play is now full of strangers. Many people roam around drunk, and neighbors sing loudly, non-stop. Even the electric wires hang above like messy spiderwebs. Worst of all, I now hear stories of crimes happening almost every day.

Still, when I close my eyes, I go back to the version of the street I once knew. I see my grandma calling us home, my grandpa on the floor watching TV and playing solitaire, our little games, the trees full of fruits, the smell of home-cooked food, the sounds of birds and chickens that used to start my day, and crickets at night as music that lulled me away.

Now, I want to return endlessly, not to the place, but to the memory that lives inside of me.



*Into The World* • Claudia Sanchez  
ink on paper

## Ravens' Nest

Elyse Kamibayashi

I've always loved stories about fantastical lands that only appear to people in need of help or adventure. Wonderland, Brigadoon, Narnia, the Lands Beyond from *The Phantom Tollbooth*. As a kid I would spend hours trudging around the backyard hoping to be yeeted elsewhere. Anywhere. But whoever's in charge of making such decisions never picked me. Maybe I didn't need it enough. Maybe I needed it too much. Maybe I needed to grow up and stop believing in things—like all the worst adults in all my favorite books.

And then, on my 29th birthday, I found myself driving my slightly damaged car, my slightly damaged rescue dog, and my slightly damaged heart to a cabin on the banks of the White Salmon River. The cabin was called Ravens' Nest. I'd stumbled across it on Airbnb while looking for a spot that would give me some quiet for my birthday. I'd wanted to be alone, but when I arrived I was met by two Pacific Northwestern witches—picture: silver hair, flannels, sensible shoes, a Subaru, and beneath it all, an ancient, deep-seated power. Not the kind of witches you see in Disney or Shakespeare, but the kind you only meet in the Pacific Northwest—picture: silver hair, kind eyes, sensible shoes, a Subaru, and beneath it all, an ancient, deep-seated power.

To my chagrin, they began to take care of me. One of the witches showed me how to build a fire in the stove. She walked me around the property, where I peered into a large, glowing greenhouse filled with neon vines. She was, it seemed, a gardening witch, and presided over all living things—including a small school of the largest goldfish I have ever seen. The second witch asked me about the books I'd brought and told me proudly that she was a poet. We talked about T.S. Eliot and Mary Oliver, and she gave me some of her poems.

Before leaving, the witches took me aside and told me conspiratorially that, because it was my birthday, they would give me a present: the use of their private hot tub. Their only request was that I bathe in the nude, since detergent might impact the pH. This, I thought, might be sketchy. But at around 9:00 p.m., I decided that if I was going to be murdered, I'd rather be murdered by woodland witches while enjoying a secluded hot

tub. Also, who knows, maybe they'd transform me into a cat and keep me as a familiar.

I was not murdered, but I think my soak did transform me a little. I emerged prune, overheated, and calmed. The next day, I left my antisocial tendencies by the fire and went to visit the witches. The gardening witch taught me about aquaponics and made me an herbal tea that was clearly spiked with soul-healing substances. The poet witch invited me to the couch and stoked the fire. We sat with our dogs at our feet and talked. I told them why I was there. I told them why I'd wanted to be alone. I told them about the girl from the spring and summer—and how it still hurt a little because she was the first. I told them about my parents—who didn't know about the girl or the hurt because they didn't want to. We walked along the river later, and they told me about how they'd met, about being queer in the '80s, about the friends they'd made and lost, about their kids and grandkids, and about the life they'd built.

When I left in the morning, the poet witch saw me off. She signed her book of poetry, and snapped a picture of my dog and me with the river in the background. Then she took my face in her hands, kissed my cheek solemnly, and said, "You will meet someone special. You just have to be patient."

I did meet someone special. I met many special people. I began to meet new parts of myself and find them a little special, too. I don't think she foretold those things—I think something about her and the river set them in motion.

I haven't been back to Ravens' Nest, but I think about it often. For months, I received periodic emails from the poet witch with her latest writing. And then this evening, I got an email from the gardening witch. She said that the poet witch had passed away. She said that the poet witch had written one last poem. I'll leave it here for you and for her. I'll read it often to remind myself that magical places exist—that people, and tea, and hot tubs can heal you, if you are only patient.

Today we are caught in the current  
of our mushrooming community.  
I have been enveloped into  
this fulcrum of light,  
off the Magical White Salmon River

Here, let my spirit enter  
the river rocks  
Pour along mother nature's  
shimmering jewels

As I find my way back home.

# ON WRITING AND PUBLISHING IN 2025

The editors of *Alchemy* 2025 have undertaken a ridiculous task—creating a literary journal, from conception to publication, in ten weeks, from hundreds of submissions of poetry, prose, and art. In the course of producing *Alchemy*, students learned copy editing, layout, typography, and more. But far more significantly, students considered editorial power and responsibility. In preparation for our issue launch, I asked the editors some questions: What do you want to acknowledge as we present this body of work? *What does Alchemy owe to those who came before us? What do you want to say about why we write/publish at this moment in time? About the truth of human experience or the value of words and art in this fraught moment in history? In relation to where you come from, and what stories you individually carry?* Their replies were moving and cohesive, in spite of all the differences that naturally come up over the course of a collaborative project.

—Megan Savage, *Alchemy* Faculty Advisor, 2025

Meaning comes from language, from words. The stories we tell ourselves often come to define us, both individually and collectively. The pieces in this issue were written before the writers had time to digest the present changes in our world, but each one, nonetheless, confronts the timeless question—How does one make sense of the world in which they live? If any sense is to be made, that is.

*Publishing artists' work is a special privilege that allows for us to promote voices that may not be heard otherwise, especially during these strange and uncharted times.*

I believe we have the ability and duty to speak out against any and all injustice, inequality and, dare I say, evil acts around the world—it's important to vocalize the atrocities that plague the global human experience.

The poetry and prose collected here are bound to inspire dialogue about current affairs, the human condition, or (my favorite) pure escapism.

*Writing brings escapism and catharsis, but also can fuel the flames of change and righteousness within people.*

A truth about the Human experience is that it is unique to every person

and people. The life one has in Southeast Asia is very different from the life one will experience in the Pacific Northwest...Talking to editors and reading the submissions from hundreds of people, I found that both torment and ecstasy exist within the Human race but it is unfairly distributed due to the society we have built in the modern era.

*Many people are silently hurting, silently scared, silently screaming at the top of their lungs through an artful medium. Art and the written word allows us to share our unique human struggles to whoever is willing to listen. Tortured souls know no boundaries and suffering is hard to empathize with unless it's put into a piece of art.*

Pieces [in this issue] might be brutal, depressing, or uncomfortable, but even fiction is someone's reality, and it's important to see and hear people in those moments, not just for them but ourselves as well.

*In a time when AI is stripping the humanity from the humanities, and humans are being stripped of hard-won liberties, it is essential that human creativity and experience be documented in the service of truth.*

I've worked with people my whole life, and it doesn't matter where you come from, what your background is—sadness and uncertainty paints a similar portrait on all of our faces.

*There are recurring themes here—rage, grief, longing, sometimes acceptance. Every submission reminds us what it is to be human; each of us may experience this world in different ways, under different circumstances, with myriad advantages and disadvantages, but we are all trying to make sense, to make meaning of it in our sloppy, messy, imperfectly human way.*

I read hundreds of poems, experienced brief glimpses into people's lives, whether explained by their author bios or left to my own imagination. That connection is why we write in the first place: to share, to connect with others in a way that would be impossible without time and energy and effort. There's an increasingly goalpost move-y conversation about "what makes AI bad." You can't have someone else make your story, you can't have someone else write how you imagined a place or how you watched events unfold. Even if you were outsourcing that work to a person, the communication would be strangled, lost in translation. Over the course of reading those poems, I got to understand each person a tiny bit. I think that's beautiful.

*To speak up, to invite others—through writing—into what is often a solitary experience is an act of bravery. It's a request to be seen. And that, in a world that is expanding its idea of who should not be seen, is more important than ever.*

# RESOURCES

---

We would like to share some resources that may support readers dealing with some of the concerns the pieces in this issue address:

## **Portland Community College Student Guide**

*An overview of some of the resources offered at many of PCC's four campuses and 10 centers—academic resources, student life, transportation, basic needs, counseling, and more.*

<https://www.pcc.edu/web-services/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2023/08/student-guide.pdf>

## **ADDITIONAL PCC RESOURCES:**

### **Basic Needs**

*(including food, housing security, transportation access, legal aid, and addressing the climate crisis)*

<https://pcc.edu/basic-needs/>

### **Counseling**

<https://pcc.edu/counseling/>

### **Disability**

<https://pcc.edu/disability/>

### **The Outreach & Advocacy Project (OAP)**

*(support, information, and resources related to dating/domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking)*

<https://pcc.edu/advocacy/>

### **Resources for non-immigration status (undocumented) and DACA students**

<https://pcc.edu/dream/undocumented/>

## **RESOURCE CENTERS:**

### *Multicultural Centers*

<https://pcc.edu/multicultural/>

### *Queer Resource Centers*

<https://pcc.edu/queer/>

### *Veterans Resource Centers*

<https://pcc.edu/veterans/>

### *Women's Resource Centers*

<https://pcc.edu/women/>

## **MISC:**

### **CLEAR Clinic**

*A nonprofit collective of legal workers who provide free legal services to Oregonians.*

<https://clear-clinic.org/>

### **Write Around Portland**

*Using creative writing to help people heal, change, and transform, Write Around Portland bring programming directly to the people who need it, writing with them in convenient places where they already live or receive services.*

<https://writearound.org/>

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

---

*Atzimba Alfaro* (Funkne) is an Oregon-based artist inspired by everyday moments. She creates emotionally driven work to express feelings that are often hard to put into words.

*John Peter Beck* was raised in a milltown on Lake Michigan in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, John Peter Beck is a recently retired professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he still co-directs a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace, *Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives*.

*Hunter Bordwell-Gray* is a lifelong Portland resident and a Creative Writing Major at Pacific University. Their writing has appeared in *The Bellwether Review* as both a contributor and editor, *PLUM: Pacific's Literary Undergraduate Magazine*, and they were recognized as a runner-up in the 2022 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

*Carrie Dietz Brown* is a watercolor painter from Los Angeles. In 2013, she received a Bachelor of Arts with a focus in Drawing and Painting from CSU Long Beach. She currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

*Saoirse Chance* is a writer, painter, filmmaker and photographer. She is the author of the poetry chapbook *Dissonance // Resonance*. She was the recipient of the Postcard Cabins Artist Fellowship in 2022. Her Radiant order is *Lightweaver* (if you know, you know) and she's obsessed with birds and books. Instagram @saoirse.chance

*Rosa Christen* is an aspiring artist and future grad student at Brandeis University. She likes playing ultimate frisbee, staring at her pet fish, and when she can get around to it (in between the staring), painting and metalworking.

*Lianne Craig* is a queer, neurodivergent, and disabled writer / artist native to Portland, Oregon. Their work is deeply rooted in sensory experience, observation, and emotion.

*Dennis Cummings* lives in San Diego County where he worked for flower growers for more than 45 yrs. He is now retired. He has published poems in *The Baltimore Review*, *The Portland Review*, *Witness* and elsewhere.

*Riley Darr* was raised celebrating the Pacific Northwest's forests and natural spaces. Inspired by her father, she has been printmaking for the past ten years. Her art often explores themes of environmentalism and sustainability.

*Aurora Duval* is a Portland-based poet and student pursuing ASL interpreter certification. As a lifelong writer, they find inspiration in nature, hardships and their golden retriever, Lupin. Aurora co-edited *The Pointed Circle's 40th edition* and continues to write, submit, and share their work wherever possible.

*Matt Eidson* is a writer and Marine Corps veteran. His work has been published in "Bull," "Collateral," and "The Wrath-Bearing Tree." He lives in Pittsburgh with his wife and son.

*Casey Elder* is a writer and musician from Portland, OR. His poem "The Stone Pig" was published in the *Bellwether Review*. He has music under the moniker's "Shambles" and "Dungeon Brothers" and is an editor of *Portland Community College's 2025 Pointed Circle Literary Magazine*.

Portland-based artist *Liam Evenson-O'Neil* has had an appreciation for the human form for as long as he can remember. He's experimented with creating it through various mediums and found ways to transfer his skills between acrylic painting, watercolor, digital illustration, ceramics, and sculpture.

*Marcus Ethan Estrada* is a Filipino-American student at Portland Community College. Born in California in 2006, he spent his early childhood moving around, making friends in the Philippines, Las Vegas, and elsewhere. He's always loved historical fiction, sci-fi, and cats. "Girls Grow Faster" is his first piece published in a literary journal.

*J Farr* is an ordinary person born and raised south of Portland. Diagnosed with autism at age 4. Former visual artist, now passionately pursuing science as a full-time student and part-time fiction author. May my work bring bright challenges to the mind!

*Janet Garcia* is a Mexican American graphic designer based in Portland. Raised in Wyoming, she draws inspiration from her cultural heritage as well as her life experiences. Her work often reflects this, bringing a unique perspective. Outside of her design, she spends time with her family and is often connected with nature.

*Lisha Adela Garcia* currently resides in Texas. Her books are: *This Stone Will Speak*, *A Rope of Luna* and *Blood Rivers*. She is the recipient of the *San Antonio Tri-Centennial Poetry Prize*. Lisha is a Certified Poetic Medicine Practitioner and the Poetry Editor for *Voices de la Luna* literary journal.

*Cecile Gonneau* is a self-taught artist based in Belgium, Cecile Gonneau is passionate about drawing enigmatic black and white compositions. Learn more at: <https://cecilegonneau.com>

*Kamea Gray* is an aspiring artist, photographer, writer, and filmmaker from Oregon. She plans to pursue a B.A. in the arts and is dedicated to a lifelong pursuit of creative expression. Through her work, she hopes to capture the beauty of the flawed human condition.



Ryan Gregory is a student at Portland Community College who spends all of his time in the ceramics studio practicing wheel throwing, his work is sometimes inspired by science fiction novels and often by other artists around him.

Colleen Harris earned her MFA from Spalding University. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her collections include *The Light Becomes Us* (forthcoming 2025), *These Terrible Sacraments*, *God in My Throat: The Lilith Poems*, and chapbooks *Toothache in the Bone* (forthcoming 2025), *That Reckless Sound*, and *Some Assembly Required*.

Hollie Hardy is the author of two books of poetry, *Lions Like Us* (Red Light Lit Press, 2024) and *How to Take a Bullet: And Other Survival Poems* (Punk Hostage Press, 2014). She teaches poetry workshops online and hosts Saturday Night Special: A Virtual Open Mic. Learn more at: [holliehardy.com](http://holliehardy.com)

Isaac Humphrey (they/he) is a recovering academic. A native of South Carolina they have flitted from region to region in search of the great unknown Something. Their work often examines queer and existential themes.

Sandrine Jacobson, an Australian-born Californian, has diligently refined her craft. Layered techniques imbue her creations with depth and emotional resonance. Each piece showcases the evolution and potency of her creative voice. Sandrine pushes the boundaries of artistic expression, crafting pieces rich in authenticity and emotional depth. [sandrinejacobson.com](http://sandrinejacobson.com) [instagram.com/sandrine\\_jacobson1](https://www.instagram.com/sandrine_jacobson1)

Carrie Tilton-Jones is a queer, disabled artist, writer, and facilitator who values courage, compassion, connection, growth, and joy. Born and raised in Texas, she now lives with her partner, their young adult kid, and a slightly absurd number of cats in southwest Portland.

Max Murray Klein is a queer multimedia artist born and raised in Portland, Oregon. He hopes to capture the complex and innate beauty of human beings in his art. After completing training Max plans to begin his career as a tattoo artist.

Ashe Kusagaya (they/she), is a writer & zinester straddling two PNW states. Her work explores intimacy & relationships from a biracial & queer perspective. They currently volunteer and facilitate for Write Around Portland's Resonate Writing Circle.

Elyse Kamibayashi is a queer, Asian American writer based in Portland, Oregon. Her work explores the process of healing from religious trauma—and the in-between-ness of being both biracial and bisexual. Her work has appeared in *Alchemy*.

J.Artemis Mackay (they/them) is a queer, trans writer who lives near a lovely bridge. They hold a master's degree in comparative social change from University College Dublin. You can find their poetry in this year's *Bellwether Review* and *The Pointed Circle*.

Maria Malankina moved to Oregon two years ago, and discovered ceramics at PCC just last year. With a background in architecture and a long-time interest in painting, she found working with clay both natural and enjoyable. She's been building her skills since then, and plans to continue exploring this creative path.

Julian Matthews is a mixed-race poet and writer from Malaysia. He is published in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, and *Live Encounters* among other journals and anthologies.

Ryan Mattern holds a BA in Creative Writing from CSUSB and MA in English from UC Davis. His work has appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *Portland Review*, and *The Santa Clara Review*. He lives in the South.

Caledonia McGraw is a writer and student at Portland State University. A proud Portland Community College alum, she is passionate about literature and the art of storytelling.

Claudia McNellis is a Portland painter who is following the advice her mother passed along: "the best thing for being sad...is to learn something."

Aj Muise is a writer & musician from Massachusetts. Living in Portland, they spend most of their time writing poetry, composing music, studying, and spending time with her friends and family.

Zach Keali'i Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in *Raritan Quarterly*, *Reed Magazine*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Coachella Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *FOLIO*, and more. He has published the chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press). He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Thu Nguyen is an artist working with cameras. She starts with making documentaries in Hanoi where she grew up, before moving to the US and becoming an interpreter along the way. She now lives with her husband and three year old son in South East Portland.

Holly Peck is an average teenage girl who's always finding life through stories. "Continuing to find beauty in life, I keep on living. There's nothing more to say."

Kannikar Petersen is a painter living in St. Helens, Oregon, originally from Bangkok, Thailand. She enjoys painting portraits, especially of her loved ones. She is an architect and a partner in AKAAN Architecture + Design LLC.

Katelyn Pike is a writer based in St. Louis, Missouri, "though I am a former Portland resident. I pen literary and speculative short fiction that captures subjects both beautiful and brutal. Last year, I had fiction published by *Another Chicago Magazine* and the *Minnesota Review*."

Mae Mae Rattler is a student at PCC.

*Claudia Sanchez* is a Cuban illustrator and creative designer based in Portland, Oregon. She explores creation as an evolving, cross-medium process. Currently specializing in Multimedia and Animation, their work reflects a love for learning, nature, and hands-on experimentation.

*Erica Schroeder* is based in Oregon after living across the US, in Germany, and South Korea. Her work focuses on women and neurodivergence by bringing forward the internal emotional struggles from every day life. She's a trained therapist, published author, and spent 25+ years in corporate leadership and in applied psychology research.

*Princess Jillanne Sierra* is a student at PCC.

*Liam Strong* is a disembodied genderless question mark and the author of three chapbooks. They died in 2020 and have been writing ever since. Find them on Instagram: @beanbie666.

*Qin Tan* was born and raised in Beijing, China and is currently based in New Jersey, USA. Tan's work explores internal dialogues and methods of expression that are observant of what it means to be human in the present day. The subjects of her paintings range from surreal landscapes to symbolic stick man figures that occasionally morph into different objects and tools. They reflect and capture life in its most pure and primordial form—blue skies, green grass and a conscious observer that is looking for answers and meaning. In 2015, she graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Her work has most recently been exhibited at ART 021 Contemporary Art Fair (Shanghai), Tree Art Museum (Beijing), COCA (Seattle) and more.

*Svetlana Tomlin* grew up in Moscow, Russia. In 2022, she had to leave in protest of the invasion of Ukraine. After traveling through the Southern Caucasus, she found herself in Portland. She also found herself to be a writer. She writes stories about women who deal with love, war, and immigration.

Originally born in Newark, New Jersey and of Puerto Rican descent, *Kristan Torres* is an outstanding multi-talented individual. Embodying what it means to be "unique," he is bold and outgoing, yet humble. Kristian traveled across the country in hopes of kicking off his art career in the city of roses.

*Benjamin Welsh* is an artist based in Hillsboro, Oregon, who has been making since he could remember, and has had a fair share of creative interests over the years. These include drawing, photography, animation, some storytelling, 3D-modelling, and percussion. He's not sure where he's going, but hopes to continue a life in these fields.

*Kiddo Wybie* is a multinational, multimedia artist, writer, and editor. It has been writing poetry since 2022 alongside its main works in ceramics, dance, and mixed medium sculpting. Focused on childhood trauma and recovery, Wybie describes its art style as uncanny, bittersweet, and vivid.

# COLOPHON

---

## BODY TEXT

Perpetua

## TITLES

Span Condensed

## PROSE AUTHOR NAMES

Span Compressed

## POETRY AUTHOR NAMES

Span Condensed

## DROP CAPS

Span Compressed

## ART TITLES

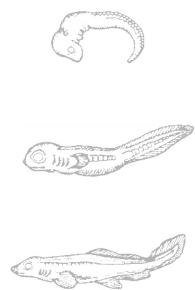
Span

## ART MEDIUMS

Span Compressed

## ARTIST NAMES

Span Condensed



\$5

