

My *love* Letter to the bay & other poems

By Claire Champommier

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Claire has some rare notions, but I dare say, no scarcity of words. If you like your life in the raw, Champommier's works are well done. It only stands to reason that freethinking leads to original thought and she has more than her share at what I suspect is a tender age. "Forgive me, I only expected / miracles..." "Like you, I am an estuary of confused foreign and familiar emotions." "Grandpa died and left / a mess in his wake." "My mistress' eyes are glassy and wide set; / Coral is just as crusty as her hole;" "I visited the version of me the day before / I became pregnant with myself for the first time..." "I crawled out through my cervix and realized / I couldn't stuff the butterfly back into its cocoon." Many, many gems here and not so much mining... "a blinker in the turn lane / is the courtesy of saying /goodbye."(Spacing & format poet's own.)*

My love letter to the bay

Today I am asking you, a place, to forgive me.
I've come back – your haunted
houses and hillsides don't scare me anymore
because I reminded myself of how
I'm the one who colored you in this way. Forgive me,
I was younger
than I already am.

I walked to the edge of you, thinking I'd find something
waiting for me. Forgive me, I only expected
miracles, and it made me disappointed
in you. I've come to breathe

with every wave of you today. It is my peace offering,
to let myself be held between your rocks and cigarette butts today,
in your edges. The last time

I was here, I loved looking out to you

and imagining I was somewhere
at the bottom. Far under all the noise from
a homeless shuffle
and yacht club parties,

but still
living in the bay. Now I look at you
and I just love you.

I want to ask, in this moment,
are you ready to forgive me for everything
I thought you were? I colored in your skyline. I couldn't help it.
I missed out on you. We are not so different.
Like you, I am an estuary of confused foreign and familiar emotions.

Before I leave, I draw a heart with my finger
on a dirty car window
so you can see the space I've left behind. In some time,
someone will wash it without thinking.

Not holding hands

Just touching the hand of the departed.
Grandpa died and left
a mess in his wake.

At the mass, the priest wore an earpiece microphone like
a sports referee in a stadium
speaking softly and heard

through the speakers in the back, now broadcasting
the post commentary.
Some people want their bodies

to be stuffed
with chemicals, herbs, and good
smelling things

and put on display, like a

Thanksgiving turkey you're not allowed to eat.
Everybody says a prayer,

Says thank you,
even if the turkey doesn't look like grandpa anymore.
The chefs tried their best.

The first time I touched the hand of the departed, I was seven.
I pulled back, afraid
from the emptiness I felt. I became aware

that grandma had once been
inside. I was looking into an abandoned house.
So when grandpa died, I prepared

myself for the cold. My hand on his stayed
still. That night, I dreamed my hand cut off from my wrist.
I picked it up with my other, and was shocked

I couldn't feel it. Instead, I felt its full dead weight.
I woke up panicked. Come back to me.
Some people, you hold hands with. Others

just touch you
and leave without knowing you felt it.
We watched the gravediggers bury him

with loud machinery. A crane. Sacred.
And then they slung their shovels over their shoulders and left in a hum.
Grandpa didn't try and get things in order at the end.

He thought he was going to live forever.
Looking down, my stilettos are dipped in graveyard dirt, and I think of
Achilles. Don't you wish you could have done the same.

Some people want to be a Thanksgiving turkey,
put into sacred tupperware and left in the fridge.
others want to be obliterated and

put on a mantle
cast out to sea
disappear in a garage.

Sonnet One-Dirty

My mistress' eyes are glassy and wide set;
Coral is just as crusty as her hole;
If snow be cold, her underboob has sweat;
If hairs be long, they hide her large back rolls.
I have seen healthy cheesing, clean and white,
But no such hygiene see I in her teeth;
And in yankee candle is more delight
Than in the cunt that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak and wield a knife;
That makes people's heads turn and hit the ground;
I've never seen a penguin in real life;
My mistress, when she walks, waddles around.
 And yet, by heaven, you think my love as funny;
 I don't care – she has a lot of money.

Self-revision

I didn't know how to bounce back from broken promises I made to a younger version of myself. Nervous and wanting to be wrapped in something strong, I tried casting spells to keep the knowledge of hurt away. But

wishing dangers to disappear didn't help any version of us. Call it bound to, call it unlucky. You fell out of our home because the door was left open, and not even my golden book intentions could have prevented it. I became crazy

for explanations and wanted to rest, so when you came back to let me know I look like shit when I blame myself for being dealt a bad hand, I laughed at how right you were. I didn't expect you, my ghost,

to help me stand again. Before I promised I'd never let them touch you, but the world is a painting without seatbelts – at the end of the day I will track paint on the rug, and I cannot bear to hate it forever. I was not made to

be a home for all the right answers, so thank you for reminding me that I can edit my promise. Oh, I am sorry. I forgot I could open the door again. I promise, I will never give up on you.

For once, a somewhat serious love poem

I told you that going down
on you and coming up again to

your mouth is like when you soak
in the hot tub and then jump
in the pool. You laughed

because you said it was like I was
saying it was hot, and yeah. It was.

Before and after that I look up
online:

when do people say I love you
because I need a timeline
and you messed up my schedule.

We went to Sauvie island
and fell asleep there

the hydrangea fields

on the beach, I had the idea that
this might be the best thing yet.

We just needed to keep
driving a little further to find it. And

the Hereford cow that startled us.
Flies all around
it, and when it turned around

to look at us once it passed
I think it saw us. She disappeared
into the bush, and took the buzzing with her.

Pregnant with myself

I visited the version of me the day before
I became pregnant with myself for the first time

and finally started caring about the baby. I'd been
a depressed caterpillar, stumbling every night my freshman year,

but I still forced myself to eat for the premonition of myself.
Sometimes, it's easier to have empathy for the person I will be.

I didn't wake and realize there were two of us. Instead, I waved goodbye
to the last friend returning home. That morning, her car left

a stillness that said *now we will begin*. The first trimester we were alone
in a college dorm, and I was still a baby myself. I learned to treat the mourning

sickness with hours spent focusing on the springtime outside of me.
I took us for walks and showed you how life would be

if we blocked everyone out – only the voices of taxi drivers to catcall us,
and every so often, we would pick up our dose of face-to-face,

mask-to-mask socialization at the gas station counter. *Have a nice day*.
I was a baby having a baby, so by chance we met

an old classmate to almost fall in love with –
she was a traditional eggshell and always somewhere colder –

I was attracted to the familiarity of this, because
so had been my mom. I learned how to leave even when I was wanted.

The last day I saw her she cried that the stars said we were meant to be, and I figured
I should listen to the signs inside myself.

I carried us for nine months through a pandemic, the whole world advising us to go home
where it is safe. In our last trimester, we went back to our family,

and I stood up for you. For the first time. You were afraid to be there,
I remember. I would not tolerate them

bullying a child for knowing their history. I could see it more clearly
with you there. I knew I could never undo the love I'd shown you, because

you made me proud. My mom said
the night I was born was quiet, snow fell

gently, the room dimmed like an expensive restaurant. On the menu was
placenta and first connections. I looked in her eyes and asked if she was my mother.

But when I gave birth to myself, I left my body
panting as amniotic fluid spilled out of me

like a runny egg. There was blood – I painted the inside of my thighs
with the care and crudeness of a cavewoman, and our screaming –

one for the struggle, one for air –
merged. After crowning myself,

I crawled out through my cervix and realized
I couldn't stuff the butterfly back into its cocoon. So

I hugged and thanked my own leftovers,
the skin that used to shield me from all this,

noise and weather, and I was hit with the knowledge that I will give birth to myself
for the rest of my life. Forever feeding and returning

what I never got. Because unlike butterflies that know they have arrived,
I am in flux, always becoming my next child.

I watch myself stand and leave my body
the same way I watch who I was grow younger every day.

When I ask her how she did it, how she got out of there

to arrive in me, she breaks my heart when she says,
somehow. ‘Somehow.’ It makes me sad
in a proud way. That’s how I know it could be, as I am, a type of strong.

Fever Dream

I dream of coming home again.
I was in a place that has passed away.

I am six hundred miles away;
A little further and I’ll rest.

Always a little further, I say, and then I’ll rest.
I forget why I fought to get out of there.

I remember. I promised my cat we’d get out of there.
I wrapped her body in a green jacket before I left.

I buried her in an orange morning before I left.
I promised her soon no one could even touch us anymore.

For a while, I said I didn’t want any of it anymore.
I knew there had to be another way.

I wish I taught myself another way,
But all I knew to do was run.

Review the reasons why I run.
Today I’d just like to let myself go.

A poem is something you let go
But first I’d like to feed out of its hands.

Until I hold it in my hands,
let me dream of coming home again.

Flying from the nest, again

Crosses and bouquets
zip tied, duct taped, or

pinned to trees and hillsides,
to freeway dividers

between this road and the next.
I start to see the cars

moving the opposite direction
as me
as no longer going places

but specifically returning
to where I just came from.

I start to believe
they are going to fill the spot
I left. I turn on

my headlights, and my dashboard
blinks on me, so I eyeball
everyone else's speed. I try to rationalize

it doesn't really matter
if I can't tell how fast I'm going
if we've all decided to go

whatever speed this is.
Then, the pause from the rain

under the freeway bridge before
I look to where the boy fell asleep

at the wheel last year.
A mother cries on
the side of the highway. In passing,

she looked like a
babybird,

waiting for the worm.
I turn my head and remember
I'm supposed to be looking at the road.

Driving back and forth
I remind myself that people understand
this lonely highway. One thing ends,

but everything else goes on.

At the four way stop
I acknowledge who came before me, and
understand

a blinker in the turn lane
is the courtesy of saying
goodbye.

Breathe again

Mom says to take off
my necklace, my earrings – and

rings, too. She leaves hers on
the kitchen counter, even after she's done

washing the things we can't
put in the dishwasher.

I like to keep my necklace on, I told her
because when it's not around my neck

it always finds a way to get tangled. Yes,
she said, but doesn't it choke you when you sleep?

Before I stopped wearing bras, she told me to
unhook them. We'd sigh. Doesn't that feel better?

She takes off her wedding ring.
Doesn't it feel like you're being unchained? Maybe,

I think. If it wasn't a gift you gave
to yourself, I could understand that.

But once she said that to me,
I couldn't unhear her –

and now I can't sleep anymore
with a band around my finger.

Do they see me as a stranger in a strange land

Though I've never heard it, I heard
my aunt, screaming, the moment we
learned my cousin was dead. Zac,

I've outlived you now. I think of
the other girls, who had nicknames
you'd give a pony for being

cute or some shit. "Peanut butter"
was my nickname, for my skin
was interesting enough to

give me a crayon's name. A girl
pointed at the nat geo page
and laughed at the African tribes.
I told her to stop, so she asked,

oh, is that *your people*? Peanut
butter coats my throat. Hard to tell
if my voice hurts after chanting
Black Lives Matter, until I hear

Black Lives Madder, and it hurts, that
I've lived on either coast, but I'm
still not sure – have I ever lived

in the America I say
I'm from? I've been to Maine – is *that*
America? Tell me, is it

the topless ladies in Times Square,
because then I've come to know that

tits, painted to give Mickey Mouse
a nose, might be America.
I heard our constitution is

the oldest living document.
It told me last night it wants us
to pull the plug already. I

hear from a different cousin from
the other end of the phone line
sitting in some jailhouse. Damn it

America, you had to suck
5 years out of him just to prove
you could lose to something stolen.

Meanwhile, I hear the melting pot
is boiling me alive. We learned
about how frogs don't realize
that they're being boiled alive

until it's too late. I laugh, since
I guess that's what America
has been cooking up this whole time:

frog soup. Yum. I think about this
and all the things I've never seen
but know. Police without badges.
I think about how a man was

lynched today, and yesterday, and
tomorrow. Someday, we'll find you.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I always wonder where this will go. I like to write about things I've dreamt and others I've seen, I'm trying to reach something I can sit with for a little while, hoping others will sit there too. I hope to make people laugh most of all, I admire comedians the most. I've been finding my voice for a while now; I love talking even when my face turns red. I was an actor first, that's how I see the world. I've always been fascinated in connections, projections, and the stories we tell ourselves.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: Claire “Champagne” Champommier owes \$5.20 to her local library. She is a proud Asian American creative and activist. Currently a student, she has studied writing at Lewis & Clark College, where her professor, Mary Szybist, has encouraged her to keep doing so. Her work has appeared in *Otis Nebula* and *SPLASH!* from Haunted Waters Press, and she intends to keep writing. She’s sending hugs to her friends and family from her room in Portland, Oregon.