

Murmuration

September 2026 • Issue #1



Editorial

Brighid Schlenz
Gay Debord
Theo Whitcomb

Contributors

Abigail Hansel
Antoine E. Davis
Clover
Community Jail Support
Meg & Colin
Fried Egg Workers Union
Raul Preciado Mendez
Theo Whitcomb

Design

Luka Grafera

Illustration

Luka Grafera

Print Production

Print Studio
Independent Publish-
ing Resource Center

Fonts

Swear
OH no Type Co.



Issue #1 Contents

- 3 Introducing Murmuration
- 4-9 Banking Problems
- 10-15 A Glasses Monopoly at the
Department of Corrections
- 16-25 The Case of the Sinister
Horsemeat Ring
- 26-33 Bad Eggs
- 34-37 Free! Community Jail Support
- 38-41 Excerpt from Autogynefolio
- 42 Submissions
- 43 Support

Introducing Murmuration

A murmuration is when a flock of birds moves together in a coordinated way. No one bird leads. Instead, they self-organize, sharing information and cooperating mid-flight. For us, the editors, the movement is more than visually arresting. It's a romantic example, an aspiration of how individuals can move together.

Murmuration is, in its own small way, an attempt to participate in this style of coordination. Through written work focused on solidarity and struggle in the Pacific Northwest, we are practicing a belief that a common project can help cut through the isolation and fragmentation many of us associate with digital space. We hope to bring political struggles into clear view, circulating literary works widely and tying together, in something you can hold, some of the fights, passions, and poetry of the region.



Banking Problems

The Blazers and Their Troubled Line of Credit

by Theo Whitcomb

After the land acknowledgement was projected from the Moda Center's jumbotron, Andrew Hoan, the President of Portland business lobby the Metro Chamber, thanked that afternoon's sponsors: US Bank and Oregon State University.

"Let's raise our orange foam fingers and celebrate Oregon State University." The crowd of seven hundred, having paid \$350 to attend the Metro Chamber's annual meeting, clapped politely. "Of course, we'd also like to thank our host, the Portland Trail Blazers."

Perhaps it was just the setting, but the promise of Portland sports—its infrastructure, its owners, and its value—was the event's central theme. Oregon's most influential figures were there to pitch their vision for the future of the city-owned Moda Center: selling municipal bonds to debt-finance \$365 out of \$600 million in renovations. This was not only necessary, they said, but a critical jolt to the economy. The Metro Chamber invited Tom Dundon, a former banker from Texas, to headline the event. He'd recently led a group of investors to buy the arena's central tenant, the Portland Trail Blazers, for \$4.2 billion dollars. Hoan hosted him with effusive gratitude.

The upbeat tone was striking in how out-of-step it was from what people across the city were witnessing. For the last year, the Blazers' new owners were successfully wielding the fact that they could theoretically abandon Portland, take the team to a different city, and absorb any penalty imposed on them for doing so. This was a common tactic owners use to win favorable subsidies from states and municipalities.

In this case, Dundon's crew were demanding, on their terms, blank-check financing for the Moda Center's renovations, working with Portland Mayor Keith Wilson and Governor Tina Kotek behind closed doors to negotiate the enormous funding package. The leaders were intent on making it work, with Wilson indicating willingness to pull funds from Portland's progressive wealth tax ostensibly intended to fund climate adaptation programs. Kotek had led a quick passage of a Senate bill to issue bonds to raise \$365 million. What remained unclear was what renovation even meant. The term was deliberately unclear and, with little to no detail, entirely on the owners' terms. They refused to produce any details, and, when offered a draft proposal by the City Council outlining basic terms of the funding, the owners stopped all negotiations entirely and excoriated the deal in an anonymously sourced story in The New York Times. The draft was a basic outline, requiring the owners to pay a mere \$3 million a year in taxes for Portland's schools and agree to enter a labor peace agreement with

a local union workforce, reportedly a key source of contention. In August, the City Council formalized the term sheet, passing it in an 8-4 vote and setting the stage for negotiations.

At the Metro Chamber meeting, speakers stuck to a script, presenting the project to constituents as a driver of future economic growth for Albina, a historically Black neighborhood that was dismantled by bulldozers for post-war urban renewal projects, including the Blazers' former stadium. "This building is about much more than sports," said Governor Tina Kotek. "The state is committed to ensuring that a modernized Moda Center becomes a lynchpin for the transformation of Lower Albina."

The optimism stood in contrast to the owners' unwillingness to provide basic concessions. It also underscored the unsettling position the State's Democratic leaders were in: managing austerity budgets across healthcare, schools, and social services while simultaneously going into debt on behalf of privately owned sports teams. In other words, standard American fare.

In this case, Oregon's leaders framing the Moda Center as a public necessity for the State hid a starker reality. For decades, austere social spending existed next to ballooning public-debt, largely raised to pay for tax cuts, subsidies for private firms, and to inflate the value of financial assets. On behalf of the richest Americans, Oregon taxpayers, by taking out more debt, were funding the accumulation of the owners' dynastic wealth with

few, if any, commitments to the barest forms of redistribution.

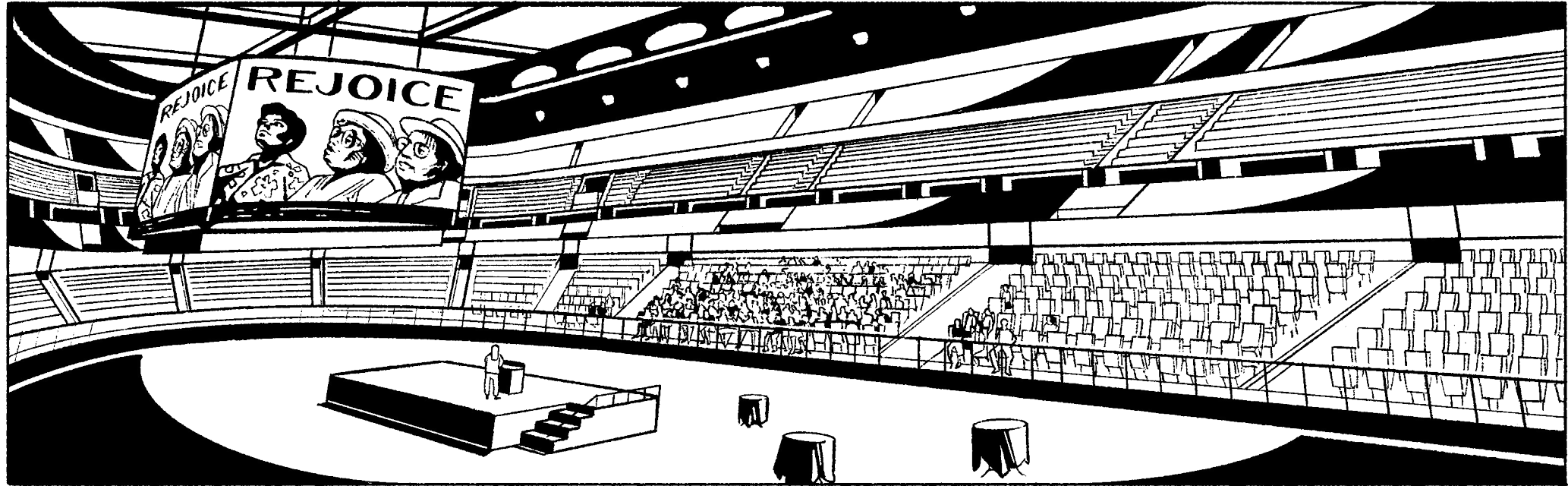
As far as the Blazer's owners were concerned, their new team was worth \$4.2 billion because it was appreciating rapidly. In the years after the former owner Paul Allen died and left the team to his estate, the franchise appreciated over \$2 billion dollars. The business environment was only getting better,

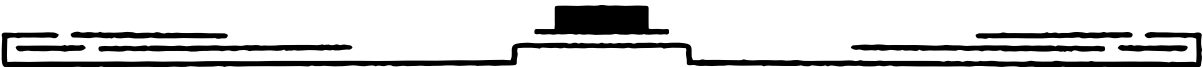
too. The NBA, the same year the new owners' bought the Blazers sold, signed an enormous media deal with streaming giants Disney, NBC, and Amazon. As the league expanded around the world, an exclusive club of owners were confident in the future value of their assets. Oregon's role was to compete with other states' and cities' to provide the Blazers' with a favorable tax environment and publicly funded infrastructure,

underwriting a business that would, inevitably, concentrate wealth in tax-shielded family offices.

The owners all came from the world of private-investing and alternative assets, increasingly a dominant force in American politics. Tom Dundon, the majority owner, had made his fortune selling sub-prime auto loans with the bank Santander USA. After a Federal lawsuit showed him instructing staff to remove "proof of income" requirements for the car loans he was selling, Dundon left the bank with a \$715 million separation agreement and entered the world of private-investing through his family office.

Co-owner Marc Zahr, whose name somehow stayed out of local media, was an executive at the Trump-linked investment firm Blue Owl Capital. Reporting recently showed the firm selling warehouses at inflated prices to the Department of Homeland Security to build "immigration jails," according to Bloomberg. The Blazers' eight other investors came from venture capital, mortgage lending, and fast food, among other sectors.





Few, other than Dundon and the venture capitalist Sheel Tyle, had done any substantial press. In talking to local media, they spoke more about their love of sports than their business aspirations. But to potential investors, it was a different story.

“As people spend more time in front of computers, letting automation do the work, we’re finding that there’s a large craving for human connection,” Sheel Tyle told a business outlet in Europe earlier this year, explaining the growing interest in sports teams as a complementary asset class to the AI boom his firm was financing. “Taylor Swift concerts, Coldplay concerts, sporting events. Ticket prices are at an all-time high. Premium entertainment culture is, in our view, going to be even more profound and important in a world of AI.”

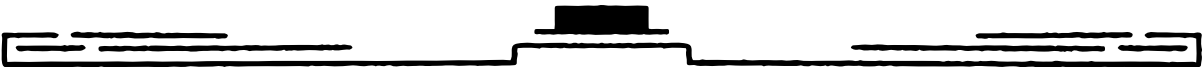
Tyle was explaining to a European audience what drove growth in the American economy: AI and the consumption habits of the wealthy, whose desire to be together and to maintain hobbies outside of the

digital world was being monetized with ever higher ticket prices. Dundon himself had stakes in the hockey team Carolina Hurricanes and recently began vertically integrating a Pickleball business empire.

In Portland, the metro region brought in The Fire, a women’s professional basketball team and the WNBA’s newest franchise, owned by the same investors as Portland soccer team The Thorns. The City of Hillsboro recently financed a brand new stadium for The Hops, a privately owned minor league baseball team, while Portland eyed the South waterfront for a Major League Baseball stadium.

Two large music venues were also being constructed at The Lloyd Center and in the Central Eastside, built with major stakes from private equity and the vertically integrated ticketing firm Ticketmaster. “Premium entertainment” as economic development, Tyle’s forecast, was materializing. For fans, it was unclear what that meant.

Aside from vague concepts about “modernizing” the arena to keep up



with industry trends, there was little indication about the architectural ambitions of the Blazers group. When Willamette Week interviewed an architect and a Blazers official about their plans for the Moda Center, the two men pitched the readership an ambiguous vision. The new stadium would feature wider “concourses” with “eddies” for “Instagrammable” moments, and be better equipped for star acts. It would feature a new type of hierarchy of “mid-tier VIP seating,” too. A concept that seemed to accompany dynamic pricing, perfected by ticketing monopolies to maximize returns. According to the public relations official, readers could consider the system a set of new “price points,” which might appeal to a “young entrepreneur.”

This was the clearest vision offered, not much more than a set of talking points from a marketing pitch-deck. Confident in their ability to command public debt to their will with little, if any, of the democratic demands that could theoretically be formalized in a lease, the new owners were uninterested in selling a vision

to the public. Kotek’s “lynchpin” was similarly vague, predicated on the idea that premium entertainment could economically anchor a neighborhood developed by the non-profit Albina Vision Trust.

Whatever happens in negotiations over the arena and the neighborhood, the financial machinations motivating the standoff will remain the same; The new owners were here to get their moneys worth. “It’s not like we lose money moving the team,” a Blazers official, somehow granted anonymity, told the Oregonian. “We might spend money, but we don’t lose money. It might be OK to spend a billion dollars on a relocation fee if the valuation of the team doubles. Of course you would do that.”

Theo Whitcomb is a writer and filmmaker in Portland. He writes about the politics of land-use, agriculture, and policing in Southern Oregon & Northern California.



A GLASSES MONOPOLY at the DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The Eyewear Manufacturer Squeezing Profits from Prisoners

by Antoine E. Davis

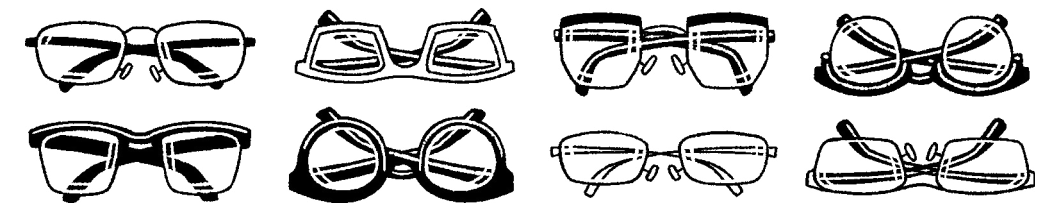
In a country where a few businesses dominate large parts of the economy, consumers have nowhere else to go and are left dependent on low-quality, high-priced items. Profits concentrate with the shareholders. When the consumer is in prison, that problem is amplified. There is, literally, nowhere else to go.

Welcome to my experience buying glasses from the only company allowed to sell glasses in Washington state prisons. Correctional Industries is technically not a private business. It's described as a revenue-generating division of the State Department of Corrections. Other than that distinction, it operates nearly identically to a profit-seeking firm. Incarcerated individuals work, at an average of \$1 an hour, to assemble products like prison clothes, license plates, and eyeglasses. Where revenue is spent is opaque. I worked for Correctional Industries for ten years, yet never learned where the money is invested. Supervisors of production do not know, either.

Glasses are not a luxury. I got my prescription after an eye doctor said my poor vision might be a cause of my migraines. So, I was excited when I met with the Correctional Industries Optical representative.

He invited me to choose frames from three square cases that contained tier one, tier two, and tier three styles, at an ascending cost. The representative handed me a mirror and told me to try on anything I liked. I opted for the gold-rimmed glasses in tier three, assuming the higher cost reflected higher quality. I filled out a form to transfer \$120 from my account and looked forward to seeing more clearly in the four to six weeks it would take for the glasses to arrive.

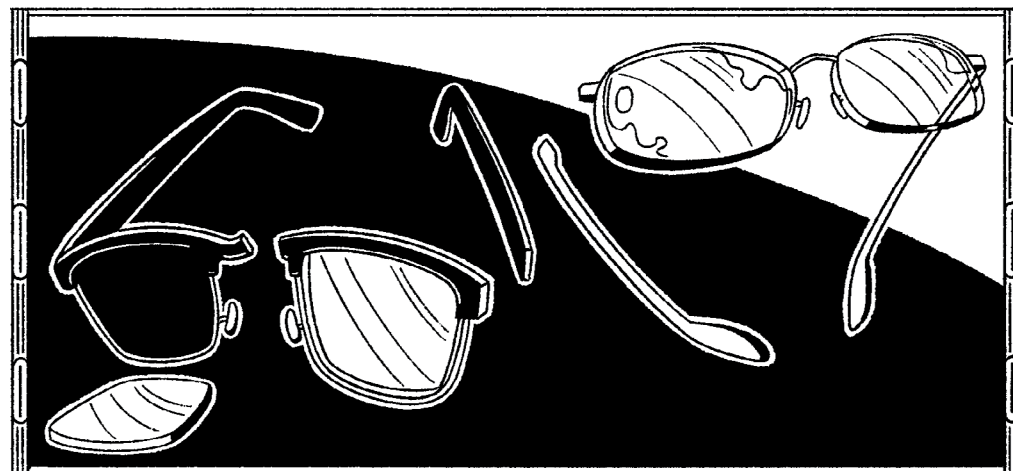
Leaving the Washington State Penitentiary's medical building, I was hopeful, and when my glasses arrived it felt like I had entered



a new world. Images were sharper, colors were vibrant. I could actually recognize people passing me on the walkway.

But within a few months, a green substance began forming around the rims of my frames. Soon after, the right lens popped out and wouldn't stay put. When the nose piece broke, I submitted a request to buy new glasses, which meant waiting another four to six weeks to see the Correctional Industries representative. The process was the same as before.

Initially, I assumed I had simply purchased a faulty pair. But over the following three years, I spent \$350 on three additional pairs of glasses, nearly four months of wages for incarcerated workers. For employees working at a minimum wage job outside the prison system, that's approximately \$12,000 worth of labor. On the second pair, the frames snapped in two places. On the third pair, the transitional coating bubbled up around the edges of the lens and began to peel. On the fourth pair, the frames snapped down the middle as I was putting my glasses on. It wasn't long before I noticed that other incarcerated individuals were experiencing similar issues.



The troubles with poor quality were compounded by long wait times. Jason Salas, another incarcerated individual, told me that within a week of purchasing glasses at Washington Corrections Center, the paint peeled around the arm and nose of his frames, while the \$50 photochromic covering that darkens in sunlight only worked on part of his lenses. When he met the Correctional Industries Optical representative, another four to six weeks after requesting new ones, he was assured new glasses were coming. After three months, he had yet to receive them.

Millord Gelin, also at Washington Corrections Center, purchased glasses from Correctional Industries. Within a week, the arm fell off due to a loose screw. "I don't really want to buy glasses from Correctional Industries. But if I want to see, I don't have a choice," Gelin said. Correctional Industries has a 90-day warranty, but a repair required waiting four to six weeks for an appointment and, after that, several weeks to get the glasses back.

Technically, there is one other choice. Under the Incarcerated Health Plan guidelines, some incarcerated individuals may obtain a free pair of state-issued glasses. But accepting those glasses could mean disciplinary action if DOC officials decide there was willful or negligent damage, destruction, or loss of glasses. These disciplinary actions can range from losing access to phones, recreation, or commissary. Incarcerated individuals can be punished with confinement to a cell for weeks. The ambiguity in the policy is the risk. Since it's not clear how rules are enforced, most incarcerated individuals decide it's safer to buy glasses, especially since the free glasses still come from Correctional Industries.

Jordan Wiester, who worked for Correctional Industries Optical for nearly five years, explained why these problems are so common: production targets to meet demand. "The CI supervisors always push for a massive production in glasses, which were

predominantly made for incarcerated individuals,” Wiester said. “The workplace always felt like a sweatshop.”

“The raw material arrives in what looks like a rubber hockey puck,” said Wiester, describing how the lenses are made. “That material is then lined up and mounted on a wax block, before going through a generator that shaves down the material. From the wax block, workers move the material to a fine-grinder and polisher, which smooths the material before it is shaped into a lens that fits the frame. The glasses are then sent to a machine that removes sharp edges around the lens. Finally, the lensometer verifies that it matches the prescription before glasses are shipped to the incarcerated buyer.”

According to Wiester, many of the incarcerated workers cut corners to satisfy the supervisor's production quota. Lenses aren't properly shaved, coating temperatures aren't met for transitional lenses, and scratches in lenses are ignored. Wiester said that anytime he brought defective glasses to the supervisor's attention, he was told the glasses were fine. Despite scratches, bubbles, ripples, and peeling in some lenses due to coating problems, Wiester was told to prepare them for shipment.

For the most expensive pair of glasses, Wiester said the cost of materials is around \$30. They sell for up to \$180 a pair, a 500% markup. Such information is easily accessible to CI workers, who handle everything from purchasing raw materials and processing sales orders to building and shipping products.

The dozen prisoners I interviewed all complained about Correctional Industries' high cost and shoddy products. Since most incarcerated individuals only make \$1 an hour, they are working hundreds of hours for inferior glasses made by other incarcerated individuals under a lot of pressure. “It's equivalent to slave owners selling cotton back to slaves for a high price after other slaves have picked it for nearly nothing,” my wife, Britteni Davis, told me when discussing Correctional Industries.

Brandin Thomas, who's been incarcerated for 23 years, said the solution is simple. “DOC should allow us to purchase our glasses from other vendors, which is not a new concept.” Prior to 2008, prisoners were able to buy glasses from numerous approved vendors, including Prism Optical, JC Penney, Sears, and Walking Horse. Then, without explanation, the DOC decided to replace those options with Correctional Industries Optical.

Laws against monopolies are designed to protect consumers from price gouging, but prisoners too often have only one choice, and not just for glasses. We pay a premium for commissary goods from Union Supply and phone services from Securus. But it's all substandard. Economists warn of the danger of captive markets, and no group is more captive than those of us who are incarcerated.

Antoine E. Davis, 38, is a writer, organizer, and pastor currently incarcerated at Washington Corrections Center in Shelton, WA. His writing has been published by Christianity Today, The Guardian, The Defector, Plough Magazine, Your Teen Magazine, The Appeal, Truthout, Seattle Journalism for Social Justice, and more.

THE CASE OF THE SINISTER HORSEMEAT RING

by Raul Preciado Mendez

Episode One: *Canter-Cut Carcasses*

Recommended Listening: Naima - John Coltrane (on repeat)

Portland, Oregon.

The rain fell as it always does. Morose and dreary, but with an air of promise.

Promises aren't kept much in a city like this.

My office was a closet in a North End boarding house, a neighborhood the city had ignored just enough for vice to thrive. The IWW used to hold meetings two blocks away. Once it was the largest union around. Now they sell insurance in its old building. If only we could buy a policy against the forward march of industry, against the beating down of the worker. This city was getting eaten alive. Slowly dunked into a tank of piranhas.

My name is Pubert Zukher.

I carried a red card once. The IWW doesn't ask for it back when you leave. Now it's just another memento in my drawer. I left after the 1922 waterfront strike, when this detective put his heel between my ribs, like he was really trying to wedge it in there. It hurt.

"Ouchie," I had said.

I didn't have the guts to do the whole labor militant thing, so I decided to try something new. Something safer. I became a private investigator. Haven't had a case in weeks. Trouble keeping the lights on, at this rate.

One night the door opened without a knock. A woman entered, followed by a horse. The woman wore a riding habit mended at the elbow, and a hat that had seen better decades. The horse was a Clydesdale, damp and beautiful. I wanted to say, "Hey! You can't bring a horse in here," but they both looked like they could use a break.

"Mr. Zukher," the woman said.

"Charmed. That is a beautiful creature. I'm impressed you got it up the four flights of stairs. HOW CAN I HELP YOU BOTH?"

I shouted the last part because a passing train at Union Station chose that moment to announce itself. She nodded. The train sped on.

"My name is Philippa Philipps." She lit a cigarette. "President of the Pacific Coast Horse Protective Union, Local 60. We provide servicing and security to equines of high importance."

"Hear you aren't doing so well these days."

"Really? From who?"

"Rumors around the neigh-borhood."

She ignored my joke.

"Someone is stealing our horses. Butchering them, selling the meat. Maybe bootleggers. I NEED YOU TO FIND OUT WHO."

A second train passed. The horse shifted its weight. My old floor groaned.

"The police won't be reasoned with," she continued. "They say maybe we're the culprits. Maybe we're trying to guarantee our job security. Work it out yourselves, they say."

The Portland Police Bureau had been saying much worse to union members since Mayor Baker took office. Usually by way of a nightstick.

"How many horses?" I asked.

"Three this month. Four total. All healthy, all from union stables. AND ALL OF THEM—"

She stopped. I assumed it was for the train to pass, but it was probably for dramatic effect. Her hand went to the horse's neck, caressing it.

"All of them were branded after death. Burned into the hide. With the IWW symbol."

The horse whinnied, a thunderbolt clapped. Everyone was silent for a moment.

"That's terrible."

"It was all very sudden."

Philippa took a long, weary drag.

"We didn't even have time to take them to the horsepital."

I stood up too quickly. My knee hit the desk. It was very loud.

Ouchie, I thought.

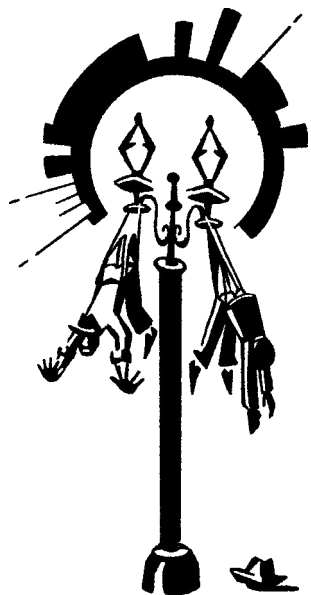
I pretended it hadn't happened. The horse looked me in the eyes. It could tell I was hurt. There was an intelligence in its gaze that was difficult to deny.

"The IWW got pushed out of town years ago," I said. "Sedition laws. We... I mean, they... don't even have a mailing address in the city."

"That's what I told the rest of Local 60," Philippa said. "Why would they come after us? But not everybody is convinced. The brand is clear. Our only other lead is a bootlegger we know to be involved in the illicit horsemeat industry. We have to keep abreast of that business in our line of work. The meat currently makes its way to our city by way of the rail-yards, see, shipped on the Southern Pacific line by a man named Tom Lysippos."

I knew Tommy. A bootlegger, a porter, a war veteran, and one of the most powerful men in the city. He ran whiskey down the west coast in the luggage racks of passenger trains. No one touched his shipments.





Two federal agents had tried in 1925. I saw them hoisted onto a lamppost by their undergarments in the Albina district. One of them made it out of the hospital, but the other one...

"The bootleg Lysippos," I said. "The Wedgy of the West."

"That's him. Horsemeat comes up from Oakland on his rail cars. Whiskey goes back down. Now our horses are turning up butchered and branded. We don't know where the meat is going. We suspect Lysippos is involved. Maybe he wants to cut out his suppliers. Or a rival's trying to corner his market. Either way, he is the place to start."

Maybe it's Tommy. Maybe not. All I know is it can't be the work of a Wobbly. Someone is trying to drive a wedge in between the two unions. Like the bootheel of a detective in my delicate ribs. I wanted to know why. But I got into this business because it was safer. Tussling with Tommy Lysippos is the exact kind of trouble I was trying to avoid. I felt dread building in the seat of my pants. A phantom pain of a wedgy that wasn't there.

"Where are the carcasses?" I said. I needed to figure out what I might be getting into.

"We're keeping them in a warehouse in Slabtown." Philippa stubbed out her cigarette on the floor. The horse watched her. It waited until Philippa was distracted and ate the cigarette butt.

"I'll take you," she said.

"Should we ride the horse?"

"No. He doesn't like that."

We went outside. The rain slowed. The horse walked between us, its hooves clicking on the wet pavement. A man selling newspapers looked at the horse, looked at me, looked at Philippa, and said:

"What a beautiful family."

Neither Philippa nor I corrected him.

We got on the streetcar. Its wheels hissed as it approached the platform. HOR-C 55 was painted on the front and was peeling slightly. The horse stared at me through the window and kept pace. Trotting, and always watching.

After some time we got out and walked the rest of the way in silence. The horse walked between us again. Railroad tracks ran parallel to our route. Another train passed. Neither of us shouted this time. By the time we arrived at the warehouse, it had stopped raining. The sky was the color of an old bag of hay.

The warehouse was shabby. The street outside was quiet at this time of day. Inside, it was what you would expect. Boards barely holding onto rusted nails, like a working stiff trying to make a paycheck last. Leaking skylights. The standard fare. I can't say I'm unfamiliar with horse warehouses. I have made my way around them for reasons that are both humiliating and uncountable.

Our group found our way toward the back of the building. It was dimly lit and smelled of manure. There was a pressure in the air, the lingering pain of a large hoofed beast. Something horrible happened here.

A canvas tarp covered a bulky heap. It smelled like blood and sawdust and something sweet. A thing that should not be sweet. Whiskey? Was someone preserving meat in hundred-proof bourbon? Pickled horsemeat?

Philippa pulled back the tarp.

The horse trembled and whinnied. It had been so calm, but now it stomped its hooves and would not go closer. It stood at the edge of the light and breathed hard through its nose.

I could see why.

The carcass lay on a wooden pallet. It had been a gelding, chestnut colored. Once beautiful. Someone had taken a cleaver to it. The cuts were amateur, but the brand was clean. The Union Bug, burned deep into the hide, after death. The skin had tightened around the edges. "An Injury to One is an Injury to All."

"This is Champion," Philippa said quietly. She did not look at the horse.

The horse looked at the carcass.

"Champion belonged to Gus Parrish. Gus is our farrier. He has been missing for two weeks."

"Your farrier is missing?"

"For two weeks."

Outside the rain picked up again. I heard it on the roof.

"Is that typical?"

"No, Gus is reliable. I'm worried about him."

I knelt down. The floor was wet with something. Did not seem to be rain.

I looked at the hooves. No sign of mud, stable straw, or road grit, but there were small fibers stuck on the coronet band. Blue fibers. Curious. Someone must have wiped the hooves down. Maybe they're a novice butcher, but they have some experience cleaning up crime scenes.

"Are there more?" I asked.

She led me to the back of the warehouse. Three more pallets. Three more tarps. Three more horses. All branded, all cut poorly, all smelling faintly of bourbon. It would be a hard case.

"What are you offering?"

"Not much. Twenty-five dollars."

"That's all? To investigate Tommy Lysippos?"

I felt around my pockets for my cigarettes, and I was all out. I tried to hide my frown.

"We just can't afford any more."

"Listen, ma'am. I don't know if you've ever seen someone get wedgied to death, but I'm sure you can imagine the sight. I know you are short on cash, but I need you to understand the kind of guy you want me to go after."

"Mr. Zukher, the union is losing money," Philippa said. "Every horse

chopped up is a worker out of a job. Any corpse could be a story in the papers. If the public thinks we can't protect our horses, or that we are selling horsemeat on the side..."

The horse snorted. I followed its gaze to the carcasses on the ground. They had been powerful, once. They had pulled carriages and plows and wagons full of striking workers.

"Okay," I said. "I'll talk to him."

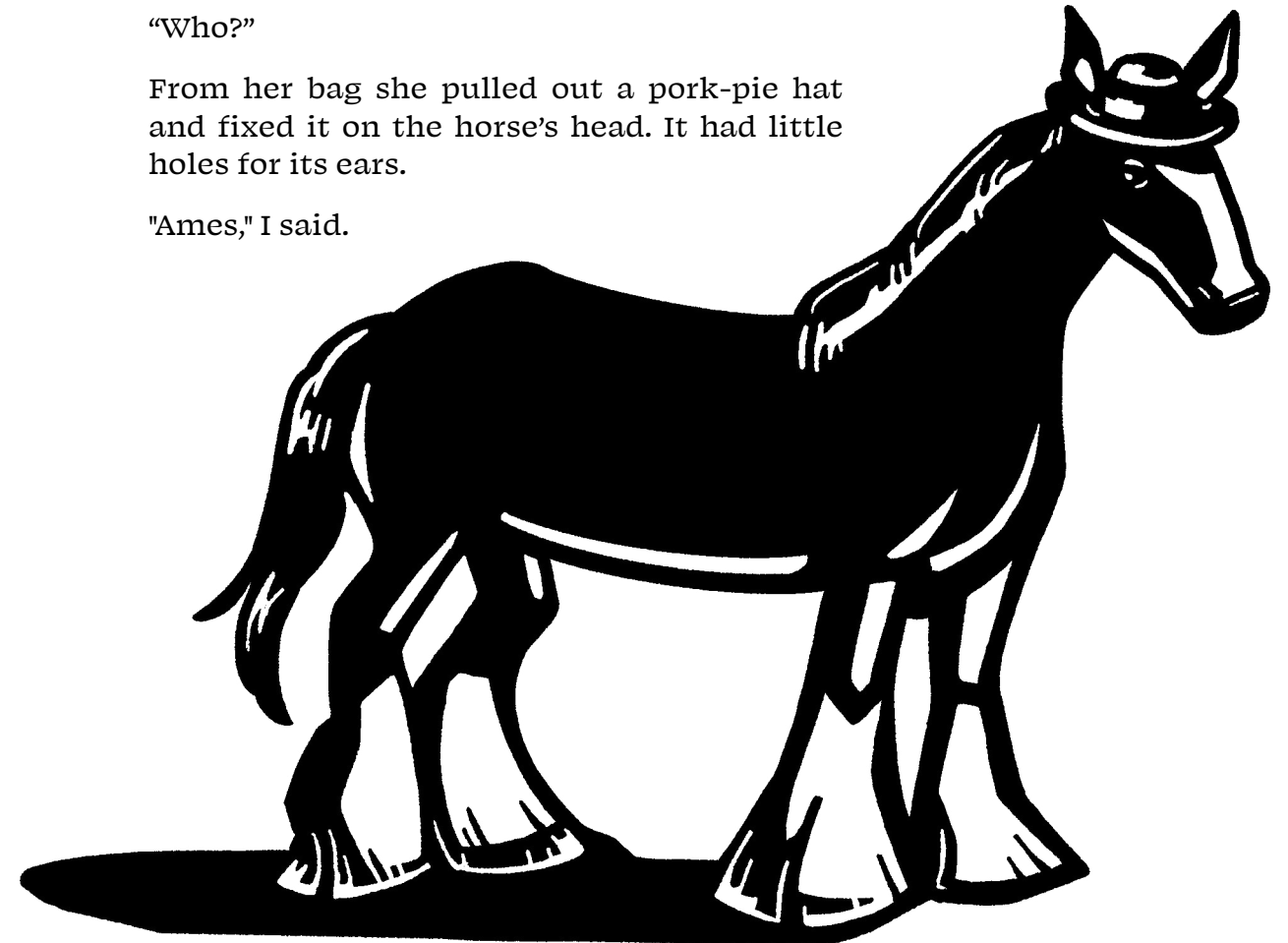
She handed me an envelope. The envelope was damp. The money inside was damp. I put it in my pocket next to my big scary gun.

"And I need you to do something else for me," she said. "You need to take Ames with you."

"Who?"

From her bag she pulled out a pork-pie hat and fixed it on the horse's head. It had little holes for its ears.

"Ames," I said.



"Ames," she confirmed. "He was in the stable with Champion that night. The only witness. He will help you find out who is responsible and why the horses are getting killed."

I looked at Ames. Ames looked at me. The hat sat crooked on his head.

"I cannot investigate with a horse," I said.

"You cannot investigate without one. The men you are looking for, they won't trust you. They won't talk to you. But they will talk to a man about a horse. Especially a horse with a hat. They will assume you are some sort of clown. Or maybe a buyer. It will confuse them. Give you an edge."

I looked at the horse again. His eyes were full of a sadness I am all too familiar with.

"I can help," the horse said. His teeth were large and yellow, and he had a strong Scottish accent. "Lord knows you need it."

Philippa did not react. She lit another cigarette.

"He can talk," I said.

"I forgot to mention that," Philippa said.

"You talk," I said, this time to the horse.

Philippa flicked some ash onto the warehouse floor. "Only when he wants to. Most of the time he chooses not to."

"Aye, she speaks true," Ames said to me. "Words...they tire me. This city. The rain. The general state of things. I can see you are a sad man, Mr. Zukher. You have the look about you. Your line of work, it lets you see the darkness of this city. It gets to you. Well, I have to tell you, you're not the only one who is affected. You're not the only one who is morose."

I stared at the horse. The horse stared back. His eyes were large and brown and profoundly weary.

"You think you have me all figured out, is that it Ames? You have this case cracked before we even start?"

"Nay, I didn't say that."

He paused. I paused. Was this horse messing with me?

Philippa produced a sugar cube. He turned it down.

"I was there. I saw the branding and the man who did it. I could not see his face because it was too dark, but if I smell the man I will know. The smell is in my nose. The whiskey smell. The blood."

I had been a private investigator for several years. I had seen many strange things in Portland. A talking horse was not the strangest. But it was close.

"But you will need to find hard evidence, too," Ames continued. "I cannot testify without revealing myself. I will not let my life be filled with side-shows. Fame is a burden I wish not to carry."

"Take him," Philippa said. "He is your partner now."

"And Ames, I will add a carrot stipend to the final payment, but please restrain yourself. The union is broke."

Ames whinnied.

"You are giving me a horse," I said.

"I am lending you a horse. Bring him back when the case is solved. Alive."

End of Episode One.

Next: Pubert and Ames accidentally join a bootlegging crew, and discover that the real horsemeat was the friends and labor we alienated along the way.

Raul (they/them) is a bureaucrat by day and a fiction author by night, living in beautiful Portland, Oregon. Originally from Mexico, they have lived in the area for a decade and a half. Interests outside of writing include powerlifting, tabletop games, and spending time with their wonderful partner. They are NOT a horse and do NOT own a pork pie hat.

Bad Eggs

An Interview with Fried Egg Workers Union Members



Since organizing with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 2024, employees at Fried Egg I'm In Love have fought together to successfully reinstate coworkers, defend their healthcare benefits, and win important workplace protections through their worker-led union. The Fried Egg Workers Union (FEWU) has emerged alongside the Burgerville Workers Union, New Seasons Labor Union, and others as part of a growing wave of service industry organizing in Portland. Murmuration interviewed FEWU members Meg and Colin about what inspired them to organize, the challenges they've faced along the way, and the lessons they've learned for other service industry workers aiming to build collective power.

Tell us a bit about what it's like working at Fried Egg I'm In Love and why you initially organized.

Meg: I was hired five years ago when Fried Egg had two food trucks and a restaurant. I was in a food truck, which was a higher wage because it was a higher job—we got to pool tips just between us, instead of sharing it with a full restaurant, making more money. When I realized there was such a big difference across locations, it rubbed me the wrong way.

We also deal with weather issues in the carts. When it was freezing and we had no water, we were expected to stay open, and to wash our hands at another cart or the nearby bar. If air quality was bad, Jace, the owner, would ask us to stay open, luring us with bonuses, even when my manager was having asthma attacks. If it's 95 degrees outside of the cart, it's 105 degrees in the cart.

One time Jace didn't realize I was CC'd on an email between him and my manager. He threatened to take money out of our paychecks if we weren't able to open the truck because the pipes were frozen, and that we should dump hot water on the pipes all day—like it was our fault the pipes were frozen! I chimed in with 'That's not legal.' He said, 'Well, I'll do something that is legal'—meaning he'll fire us. After HR got involved, he wasn't allowed to talk to us for three months because they told him off.

What was your first collective action as Fried Egg Workers Union (FEWU)?

Colin: We had a team meeting at Hawthorne and everyone was there—HR, the owner, workers—and we're talking about tipping, about different gratuity models. At the time, I was the only Black person working there, so I was like, 'Hey, I want to mention that people tip based on their own biases. People might respond to me differently than they respond to a white femme coworker.'

Everyone was like, 'Yeah, I get that.' (A manager once made a comment about a customer complaint that I was "stuck up," though I'm known for being good to customers.) Then Jace, the owner says, 'well, don't you think people tip you more just because you're Black?' I said 'no', then the whole room went quiet. I said, 'Hey, I'm going to assume you asked me that in good faith. Maybe I bring in more tips, but I don't believe it has to do with race at all.' Then he went, 'Well, I have a lot of white friends. When we go out to eat and we have Black servers, they tip them more. Don't you think Portland has a lot of white guilt, which cancels out the bigotry?' And I was like, 'No, I don't think that's how that works.' Then he said, 'Well, don't you think you make more tips than all your coworkers, just because you're Black and the others are white?'

My coworker jumps in and says, 'I think Colin answered your questions. We need to move on.' HR talked to him, told him that what he was saying was racist. Then later I get this email. I read the first line preview, and it was something to the effect of, 'I'm sorry if that made you feel bad.'

The following day we had a FEWU meeting and agreed to send emails to him, saying, 'Hey, that was really messed up, that was not okay.'

Meg: From all the locations, too.

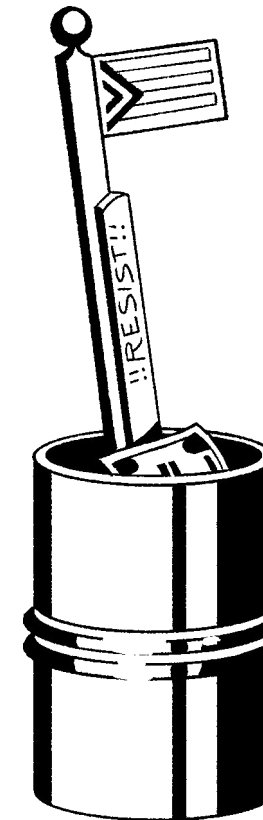
What has ownership's reaction to the union organizing been?

Meg: The retaliation started right away. We had pretty loose tardy policies. Then all of a sudden he tried to say that there was only a 10-minute grace period. Suddenly, people had tons of attendance issues—issues that were no big deal before. He started going after people for taking too many sick days and put a cap at five sick days a year, requiring doctors' notes. If you were written up three times, for these attendance or sick day

issues, you'd get fired. The retaliation really scared a lot of employees. Several employees were fired, a few quit in solidarity, then the ones that were left—while they were supportive of the union—were afraid to stick their necks out.

When I was fired I stood my ground and was like, 'peace, I'll see you in a year, because you're gonna have to hire me back.' This union has been my life for two years. Sometimes it's my reason to get up in the morning. When I was like, so over it and so bored, it made me passionate about going to work again. I was actually doing something good, making a change in the workplace and protecting my coworkers.

Colin: We all want Meg back. That's a huge priority for us right now. If it wasn't for Meg, I wouldn't have got my job back after being fired—when the National Labor Relations Board forced the owner to give me my job back.



You've had some wins in the last 2 years?

Meg: The owner came to us a few months after the union vote and told us he was getting rid of our health insurance, he couldn't afford it anymore. So we requested numbers. Since we had the union, he had to prove to us how much debt he was in. The numbers proved he wasn't actually in debt yet, he just thought he might be in the future and was going to preemptively take away our health insurance. We posted that all over the restaurants. It enraged many workers, even those who were often on his side.

A lot of people take this job because of the Kaiser Health Insurance, because they're transitioning and they want top surgery, they want bottom surgery. In my opinion, he was going after health insurance to get rid of queer employees. Something I've noticed is a lot of queer people are leftist and are activists already. He's noticed that too, which is why we think he started attacking our symbols, like banning pride flags.

Because we had won ULPs (unfair labor practices), and because we did do some walkouts, we had him scared enough to back down. Protecting our health insurance with our union is one of our biggest wins.

Colin: We got a lot of good stuff by being organized. We no longer have “at-will” employment, which is huge, especially for a restaurant. Increased PTO was a big win. If you close for weather or adverse conditions, you get paid out for four hours of that shift, even if the whole place shuts down. If they close early you get paid out for the rest of your shift. Some of which was standard for us, but again, not written down anywhere. Now we can get it in writing.

You’ve had solidarity from people outside your workplace?

Colin: We had a guy who had done some poach shifts, really cool guy. Poach shifts are when a business needs a single shift, and it goes on this thing called Poached, it’s a hiring app. Anyone can just pick up the shift, they are just helping fill in the spot for a couple hours. He’d got an email from the owner asking for information on FEWU organizers—we’d closed early one day because staff was not feeling well.

The owner offered him a “crack at the new shifts,” implying that one of us was getting fired. After telling us, he replied to the owner saying the front of house was amazing, and make it a wonderful dining experience, adding ‘I don’t appreciate having time shifts dangled in front of me for information on your employees that I don’t have. I want to let you know Portland is a union town. I won’t be coming back to take any shifts until they get their demands met.”

Meg: It fills my heart with joy. It can feel like shift workers are scabs sometimes, especially when they’re filling in because we’re doing actions. So for this person to just say no made me feel so good and so proud of Portland.

Besides retaliation you’ve been dealing with, what else has been difficult?

Meg: One of our biggest challenges has just been getting all of the kitchen workers to believe that they are worthy of a union, that what

they do is important enough. There’s a lack of confidence among kitchen employees. Unless you’re like, a welder or something, some people don’t think unions are for them, which is obviously not correct. You deserve to have a say, you have rights. It could be the best job on the planet, the best owner on the planet, and you still have the right to unionize.

Colin: The union ensures you can have a say in your place. It’s tangible, it isn’t a suggestion box that goes nowhere. The boss needs to listen.

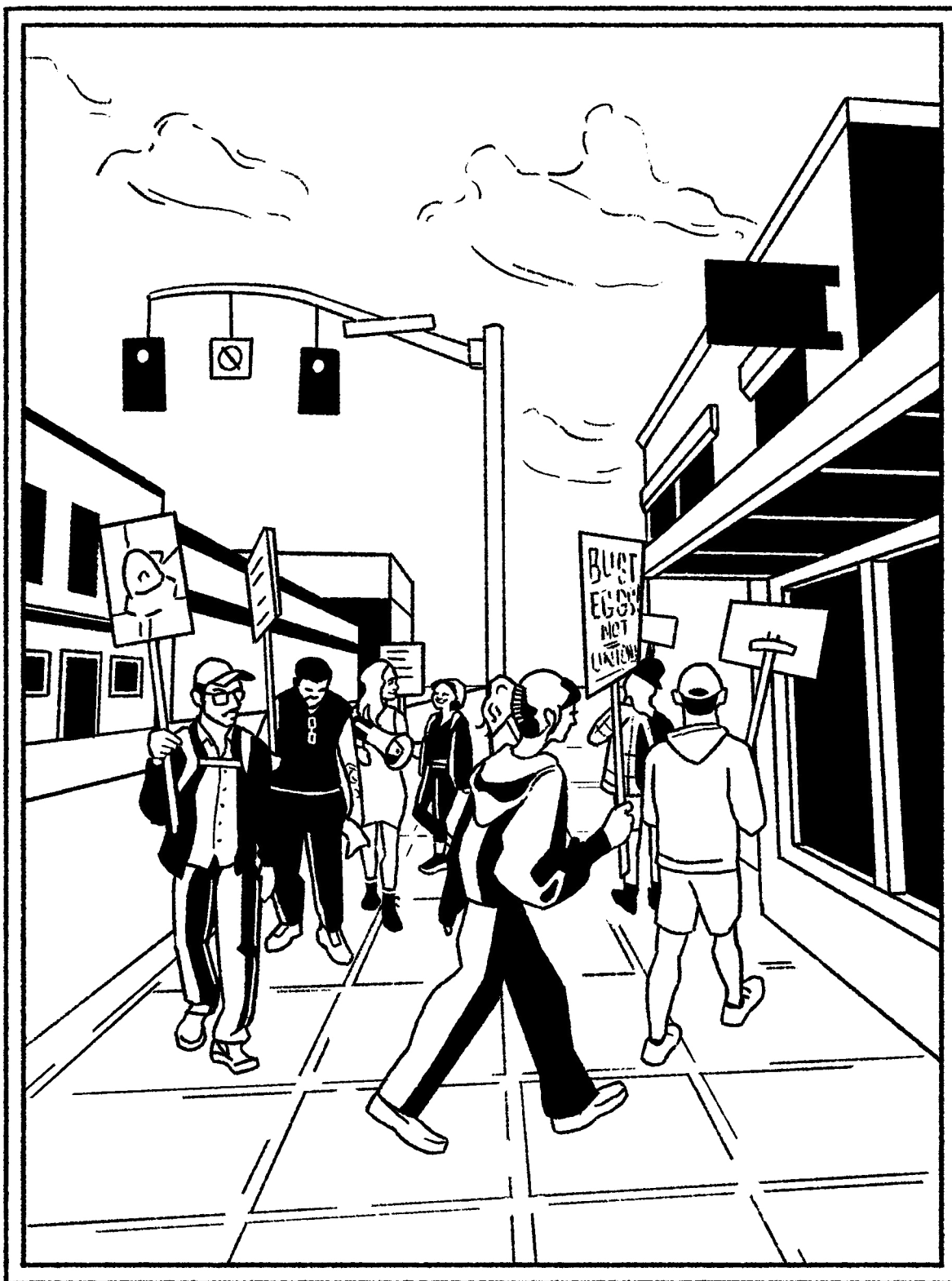
Any advice you have for other service workers in Portland who are like looking to get organized and fight?

Meg: Be secretive, and have a lot of discussions about what everyone is willing to put in—take a lot of internal temperature checks with coworkers. Often, much of the work in a new union falls on one or two people, and it’s hard to sustain that. We made a lot of promises: ‘you’re not gonna have to do anything’, ‘we just need these votes...’ We didn’t really realize we would be fighting for so long, and how stressful that is, and how little people understand how much work organizing actually is.

If I were to do this again, I would really focus on the solidarity, not only in our union, but outside of our union, and what we want to accomplish as a whole bunch of unionized restaurants. To fight to make change on not only like a regional level, but a national level, a global level, to be able to participate in general strikes that shut down everything. I would want to try to lean on that more, to show it’s not just a fight with our owner, but it’s so much bigger than that. It’s about unionizing all restaurant workers and raising the quality of living for all of us low-income employees. Dishwashers should be able to live on a dishwashing salary. Dishwashing is necessary. Cashiers should be able to live on a cashiering salary.

Colin: A world existed like that for our grandparents, where you could be a cashier and that was your job, that was your career.

Meg: Trolls and bots online say it’s not worth fighting back. We get so many messages when we hop on Reddit or whatever saying ‘just get a new job.’ What, so I can start all over again from the bottom at minimum wage at that place? Saying, you know, ‘Don’t be a dishwasher. Get a better job.’ Well there aren’t better jobs for all of us.



Someone's gonna have to do the dishes.

Meg: There's always gonna be a dishwasher. You know, I'm a line cook and it's always felt wrong to me that I make more money than the dishwasher, because I can't do my job without the dishwasher. If our cashiers aren't on their game, we don't make the tips. We all are there to help each other.

Every job has value. I'm so sick of people telling me that we're unskilled, we need to go to college. We all know there's no jobs for people who go to college! Everyone I work with has either gone to college or is going to college. This fight is bigger than us. We can effect change at higher levels than just this restaurant, and I'm looking forward to it. The IWW is helping with that, the Coalition of Independent Unions is helping with that. The support outside of the restaurant has been life giving to us, and keeps me from giving up, even when I'm feeling pretty disheartened by some things people say. The IWW does really show up for us when it comes to getting bodies on the streets when we need them. And that's beautiful. The solidarity has been really awesome.

Colin: Absolutely, the community has been so amazing this entire time. I think we both have had moments of 'oh my god, this is really, really hard, and it's really, really lonely, and they're gunning for us again. They're pulling the same BS again.' Is this worth it? And then we'll get a couple messages being like, 'Hey, y'all are the shit. You're doing important work.'

Meg: It makes us want to keep going.

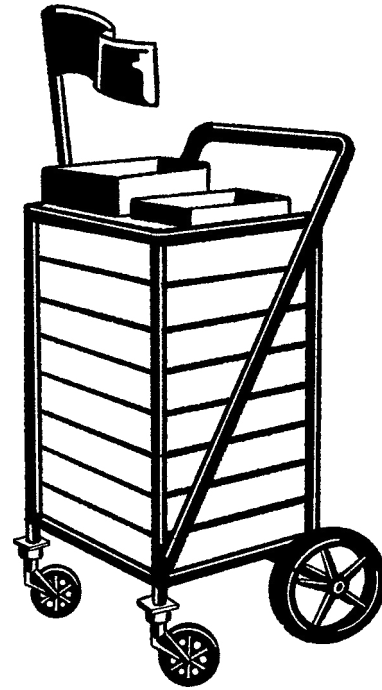
Meg formerly worked in the kitchens at Fried Egg I'm In Love for five years, starting in a food cart and later moving into the restaurant on Mississippi Ave. Colin works front of house on Hawthorne. Both are rank-and-file organizers of the Fried Egg Workers Union. This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Free!

Community Jail Support

Reflections on Fighting Isolation

by Clover



Once a week, I wheel my cart to the entrance of the Multnomah County Detention Center, a 16-story concrete building that looms over downtown Portland as both a county jail and police precinct.

Just inside the gates surrounding the main entrance, I hang a hand-painted sign: "Free! Community Jail Support." With a few friends, we settle in for an afternoon of greeting the people circulating through the bulletproof glass doors.

Every day of jail support is different, although there are patterns we've come to expect. If it's a weekday, there will be morning and afternoon rushes

of people attending their arraignments, where a judge examines their case for the first time, asking them if they plead guilty or not guilty, and then deciding if they will remain in jail until their trial. In between rushes, loved ones might stop by to add money to someone's books or to visit through a glass window or video screen. Some people with no business at the jail will stop by our table to ask for directions or to get a snack.

At any hour of the day or night, we see people released from detention and cast out onto the city street. This happens whenever someone's paperwork is processed, often with little warning. It doesn't matter if the

person is dressed for the weather, has a place to go, or a way to get there. Some people have been detained for a few hours or days; others have endured years of incarceration.

All of us came to community jail support because we felt the need to counter the violence and dehumanization that police inflict on our neighbors. One way to do that is to simply wait for the people that police have tried to make disappear. We welcome them back to freedom and offer what we can to ease their transition to life outside: something to eat, a phone to contact a ride home, or supplies to deal with the weather. Most importantly, we offer conversation and care.

Like any mutual aid effort sustained over the course of years, tensions over strategy emerge as the terrain we organize on shifts.

In 2026, the harm reduction organization Portland People's Outreach Project (PPOP) received a grant to start their own program modeled off of Community Jail Support. They also stand outside the doors of the jail offering food, Narcan, and access to support programs, but in direct collaboration with the jail throughout the process. People who do community jail support helped PPOP develop their program because our goal is for everyone who gets released from jail to have support, but it raises a critical question: How do we approach our work if it is

incorporated by the prison system we are fundamentally opposed to? How can our work adapt to a shifting environment and better reflect our core commitments?

At inception, community jail support at the Multnomah County Detention Center emerged from the George Floyd uprisings in 2020. It was its own form of abolitionist protest. Usually, relationships built by mutual aid are confined to existing political and social niches. This was different.

"Before, it was protesters waiting for other protesters to get out," said Tony, one of the first people to expand the practice of protest jail support. "That quickly evolved. Protesters joined formerly incarcerated folks, as well as people outside on the street experiencing homelessness. All of us gathered under a tent. It was no longer protesters for protesters, but community for community. There were sometimes conservatives, there was the far left. There were people who've never been arrested or committed a crime and people who were in and out of the system."

At the time, co-optation by the police and jails was not an issue; they were too busy clashing with protestors and attempting to dismantle the jail support encampment that occupied the park across the street. But, eventually, community jail support established its resiliency and importance to the broader community and the police changed

their tune. While they still found little ways to make our lives difficult, they stopped trying to shut it down and even began referring people to the tent as they were released.

Tony never believed that the police were changing in a meaningful way. "They're trying to be the good guys by referring people to us as if they were part of the solutions to the harms of the carceral system when we know they are the perpetrators," they said. To those who spend time with communities affected by police violence, the transformation seems hollow and surface-level. Over the past six years, we have seen police establish more programs and collaborations that appear to signal care for the well-being of people arrested.

Abolitionist critiques recognize that the politics of police reform, at its core, are efforts to disguise the structural cruelty of United States policing and judicial systems. Everyone I talked with has seen the ways that everyday policing tears

people down and communities apart, disproportionately targeting Black and homeless people. We've witnessed enough everyday cruelty to fill a book: people who can't support themselves being dropped or thrown on the concrete floor, people walking out with wounds from their arrest left untreated, people sobbing because they don't know where they're going to sleep that night, people who were arrested after calling the police for help.

When faced with the institutionalization of our work, I've wondered how we could continue to show opposition in forms other than protest. At our core, we want to show everyone—incarcerated people, the public, and those enacting the carceral system—that there are people who don't accept the existence of police. PPOP works alongside us to support people abused by the carceral system, but despite having abolitionist members, it is not trying to build towards a society without police or prisons. What distinguishes our work, and what needs to adapt and to deepen,

is our unwillingness to legitimize the carceral system, an orientation we believe can actually construct a world that can adequately address social harms. In order to do this, we remain willing to be arrested and ticketed to provide care, which allows us to remain dependent on our community, rather than grant requirements and the permission of the State, which can be revoked at any time. We also recognize that hostility to police can demonstrate a level of trustworthiness to incarcerated people while challenging the normalization of the violence we frequently encounter.

Ideally, when our work grows, we develop an interconnectedness that transcends the prison system. "It's a sense of responsibility to each other and our neighbors," said one local anarchist who has been active in prison support for years, pointing out that a cultural shift weakens the social control police have over our lives, empowering everyday people to act and intervene in the cycles across everyday life rather than relying on institutions.

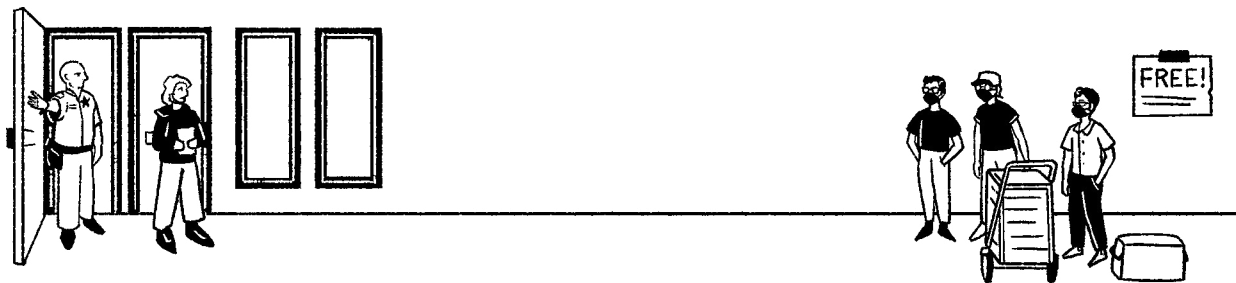
"I think that isolation should be impossible," the anonymous anarchist told me. "I think it should be impossible to isolate anybody, and I think that only happens through genuine community-building work with the people who are impacted by the jail, the prison, police."

We saw that transformation during the early days of community jail support, when people were engaged and unified by the simple fact that they opposed what police were doing to people. In 2020 and 2021, much of the time spent waiting for releases was spent talking, creating art together, and figuring out how to navigate conflict without police.

In doing community jail support, we have seen that the desire to care for one another is already there: someone who brought toothbrushes from their dentist visit, or people offering to show people around an unfamiliar environment.

When mutual aid takes the form of showing up to places we know people need help, it can act as a skin graft on the wound of isolation that has separated us, so that the entire city becomes tapped into networks of care. "We're showing that there's another way to live," Seven, who organizes with CJS, told me. "There's another way to take care of each other."

Clover grew up in the Portland metro and, in 2020, participated in the creation of community jail support.



Excerpt from *Autogynefolio*

by Abigail Hansel

*

the day that days, that drafts distended, that loofahs,
that lathers 'cross the breast, the breasts of ancestors.
I dreamt the word "MATRILYNE" which was pronounced
like "ANDROGYNE", it represented the whole of one's
matrilineal life physically like a number line (in print
it appeared like a misprint of the name MARILYN).
Outside the dream, but still inside the MATRILYNE I
wondered how many times a feeling of sexiness did
alight on their bare mirrorful. Bodies the touch of some
man who is and is not a brother (a double). But context
rings, though escape it can only come and leave leaves
dead crunchy I feel a frown coming on hardscrabble
homestead DNA activating PNW cold shoulder which
is viral and outstrips "Seattle Freeze" bitchy nineties
Frasier-type connotation when your little cardigan
server SLAMS down that green green smoothie it's what
we get for maxing out our health bars make a game of
what's left tally tally your movements

I had a dream my poems
were 30% more "chatty"
and at least 10% more epic/frisked/chiaroscuro

And I skated long on a moments edge
though last weeks' dreams were on-grid
recriminations pastly imagined workplace microviolence

Sorry, we cannot complete your transaction because of
the beetles and big big ants having SEX with the PRODUCE
SECTION. Talking w/ T- about the spiritual undercurrent
of the West and how much has to do with MORMONISM.
40% at least, but Prairie Mindset is wider/concurrent—I
imagine Brigham Young, planting his beard in our convo—I
get a testimonial for my newsletter, which in the dream is
traded in only the most elite of subcultural circles like a
pink film video nasty called:

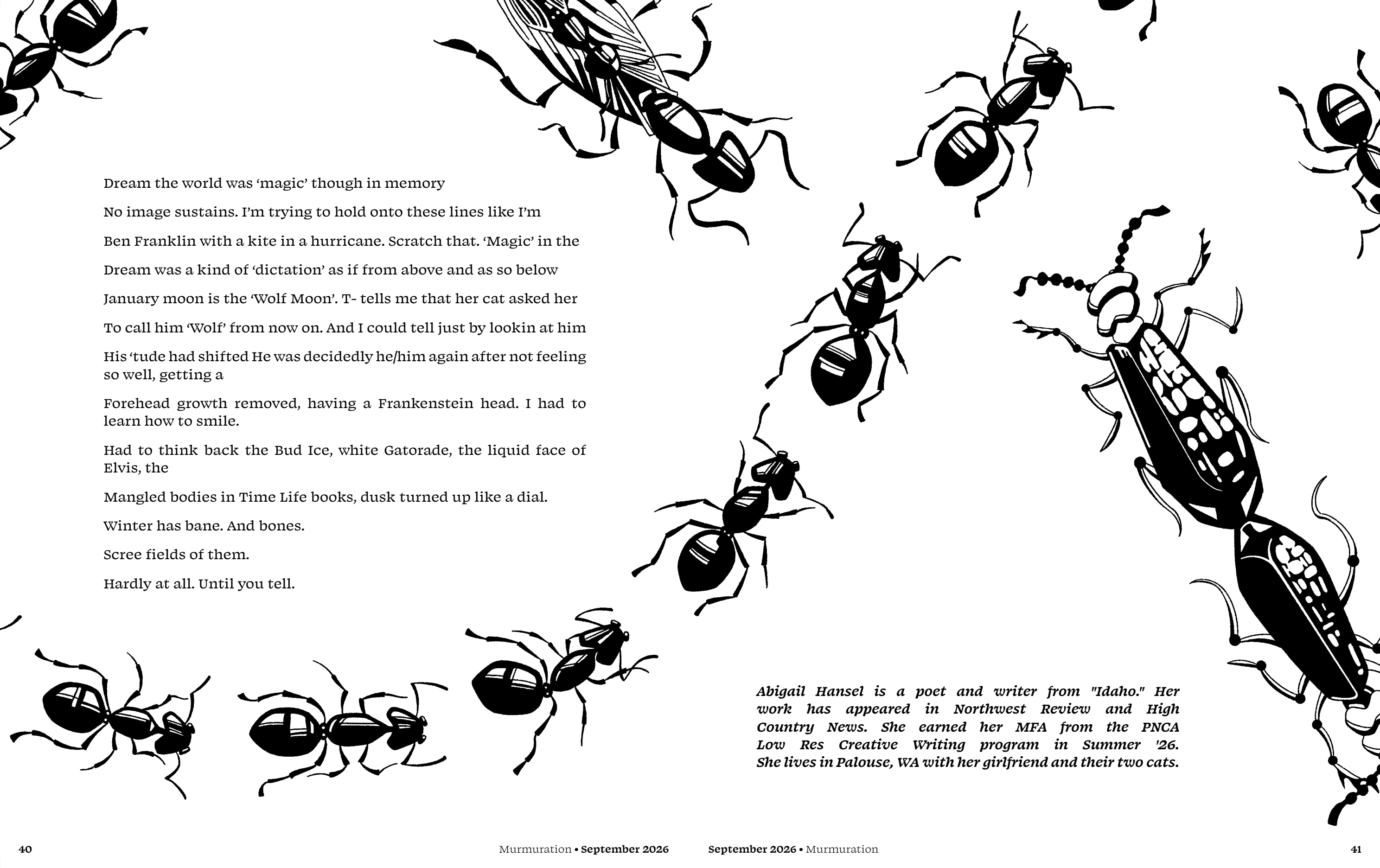
I FOUND GOD IN A POPCORN CEILING

Awake, I reread random portions of Mary MacClane's
I Await the Devil's Coming

"MARCH 13.

If it were pain alone that one must bear, one could bear it.
One could lose one's sense of everything but pain. But it
is pain with other things. It is the sense of pain with the
sense of beauty and the sense of the anemone. And there
is the mysterious pain. Who knows the name of that mys-
terious pain? It is these mingled senses that torture me."

And in terms of cognitive hygiene, it feels very
"if you've got time to lean, you've got time to clean"
I'm a backronym, "not a song and dance man"— in my



Dream the world was 'magic' though in memory
No image sustains. I'm trying to hold onto these lines like I'm
Ben Franklin with a kite in a hurricane. Scratch that. 'Magic' in the
Dream was a kind of 'dictation' as if from above and as so below
January moon is the 'Wolf Moon'. T- tells me that her cat asked her
To call him 'Wolf' from now on. And I could tell just by lookin at him
His 'tude had shifted He was decidedly he/him again after not feeling
so well, getting a
Forehead growth removed, having a Frankenstein head. I had to
learn how to smile.
Had to think back the Bud Ice, white Gatorade, the liquid face of
Elvis, the
Mangled bodies in Time Life books, dusk turned up like a dial.
Winter has bane. And bones.
Scree fields of them.
Hardly at all. Until you tell.

Abigail Hansel is a poet and writer from "Idaho." Her work has appeared in Northwest Review and High Country News. She earned her MFA from the PNCA Low Res Creative Writing program in Summer '26. She lives in Palouse, WA with her girlfriend and their two cats.

Submissions

ISO Contributors for Issue #2!

Murmuration is a way for us to circulate lively works of fiction and non-fiction, and to publish writers attentive to working class self-organization. Contributors are encouraged to critically assess the place and moment we live in, chart community examples of direct action, and bring new stories and literary works to a wide audience in the Pacific Northwest.

Pitch us your ideas for thoughtful essays on regional issues, original reporting on politics and culture, or fiction, art and poetry. We are especially interested in working with writers who are open to an engaged, constructive, and collaborative editorial style. Let's make the piece shine together!

To contribute, read our guide to pitches at

MURMURATION.PRESS

And reach out to the editors at

MURMURATION_MAG@PROTON.ME

Support

To help fund the next issue with new, ambitious work visit

MURMURATION.PRESS

Any money we raise beyond the cost of materials goes toward compensating the writers, artists, and editors that make this possible.

If you'd like to distribute the magazine, contact us at

MURMURATION_MAG@PROTON.ME



