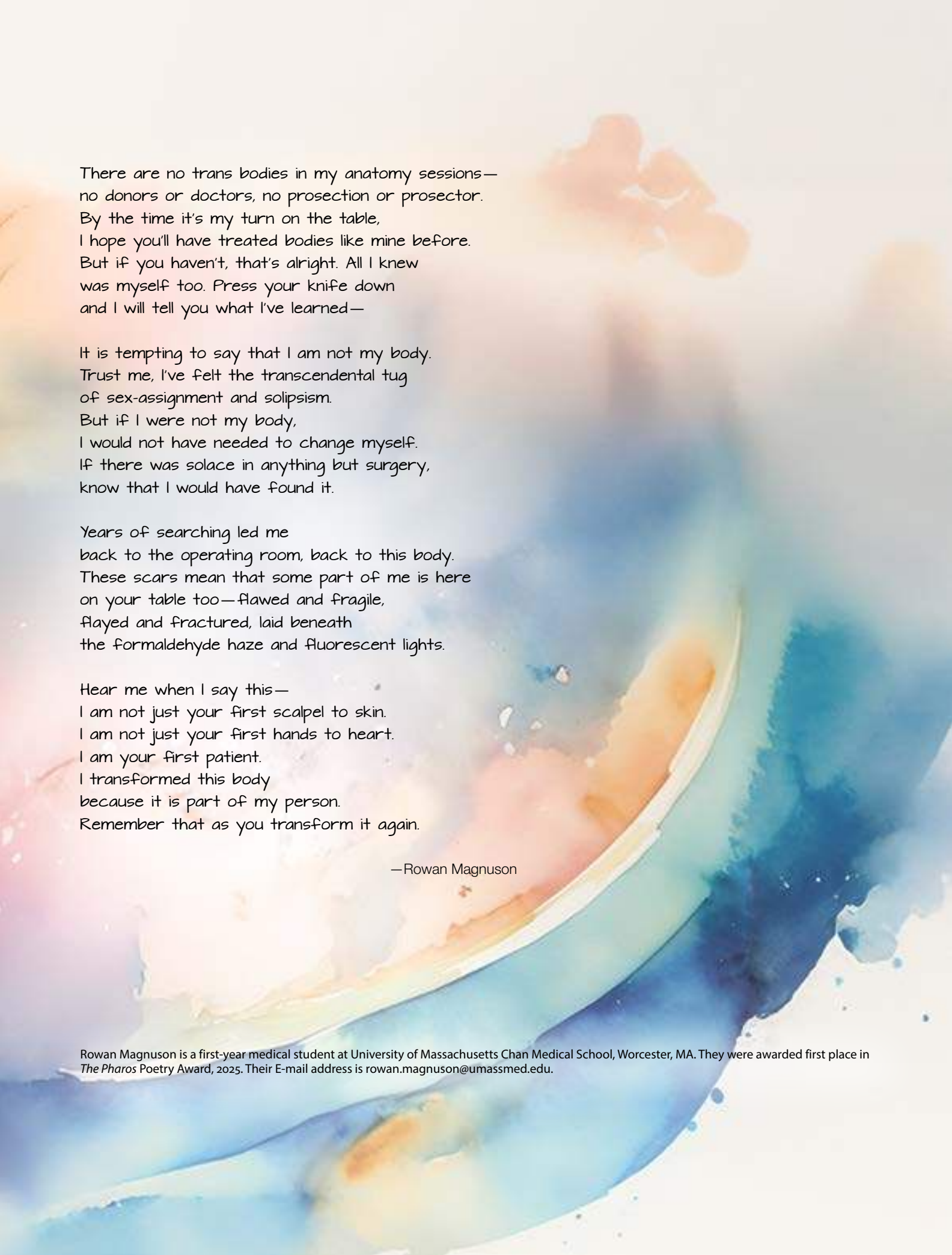


Letter to the anatomy student who is assigned my body

I don't know much about how my body will look
when I cross from caretaker to cadaver,
present tense to past. There are years,
and pounds and sunspots and silver hairs
between now and then. The one thing I do know is
when you lift that formalin-frosted shroud,
the first things you'll see are my scars—
symmetrical slits from sternum to serratus anterior.
Perhaps you'll consult laminate lists looking
for legal sex. Perhaps you'll search
the preservative-laden air for pronouns.
That's alright. I know they aren't there.

Stumble over your words, say the wrong thing twice,
make a guess, then guess again.
That's what I've done with this life.
You can see it on my chest.
Assume I gave myself a name, and I'll assume
you do the same. Make it something beautiful,
please. And place your scalpel between the scars
with sureness and a steady hand.
We're both afraid of what comes next.



There are no trans bodies in my anatomy sessions—
no donors or doctors, no prosection or prosector.
By the time it's my turn on the table,
I hope you'll have treated bodies like mine before.
But if you haven't, that's alright. All I knew
was myself too. Press your knife down
and I will tell you what I've learned—

It is tempting to say that I am not my body.
Trust me, I've felt the transcendental tug
of sex-assignment and solipsism.
But if I were not my body,
I would not have needed to change myself.
If there was solace in anything but surgery,
know that I would have found it.

Years of searching led me
back to the operating room, back to this body.
These scars mean that some part of me is here
on your table too—flawed and fragile,
flayed and fractured, laid beneath
the formaldehyde haze and fluorescent lights.

Hear me when I say this—
I am not just your first scalpel to skin.
I am not just your first hands to heart.
I am your first patient.
I transformed this body
because it is part of my person.
Remember that as you transform it again.

—Rowan Magnuson

Rowan Magnuson is a first-year medical student at University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, Worcester, MA. They were awarded first place in *The Pharos Poetry Award*, 2025. Their E-mail address is rowan.magnuson@umassmed.edu.