

RUST & MOTH

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Beautiful

Starlings have no claim to what's called beauty except when earth flings them out in a bolt of black silk unfurling across the sky, reaching, curling back, convolving as if in a sinuous wind from one great mind. Probably defensive, says science: they become a vast murmuring winged darkness, scattering the direst hawk intentions. How often the remarkable turns out to be protective. The living shield themselves in color, light, magnitude, in performance, in the guise of something else. As girls we learned the trees were full of hawks. If we got small enough, we were assured, they'd overlook us. We'd make our way to safety. What If we'd been told that in the hawk-eyed glare of danger we might grow enormous, become something huge. Something huge, and beautiful.

You'll Never Be the Same

See how the hundred-year old fir
uprooted by last night's storm

fell against another tree--
her left side skinned of bark,

leaning unstable, incarnadine
wound. How the forest shook

all night, branches, leaves,
pinecones, sorrows flung

against the Earth, leaving
only mute birds, frail insects.

A winter past we stood beneath
this same canopy, listening

to screech owls fill the starless
firmament, their scolding

clamor, a breathless minute
when one swooped

and landed above us. I love
certain places as much as

the people whose memories
inhabit them after they've gone.

I say to the fallen, *I'm sorry.*
I say, *that must have been so*

frightening. I say to the standing,
you'll never be the same.

Tuning Fork

Upside down free-tailed bat birth,
the particular cry of a pup,

the small suck of a new tongue.
The nourishment of moths, of hunters

rivering clicks through coral dusk,
of the sole survivor bumblebee queen

thawing in an old mouse hole,
the tundra sun tugging her up. The rev

of hum, of willow nectar, of berry browse,
of bog oak violin, of cello, of bass.

The velvet keen in the skin,
the root beer drums in the bones,

in the blue whale hearts in the sea.
The tar pit ossuary rattling—

Across the unstoppable freeway,
the bridge for lions rising,

clang by clarion clang.

A Night Without Bombs

That moment of stillness
a cirrus sky, peeled orange flesh
fresh tendril, a road that leads into
the salmon woods. Night. A single
star. *Sirius* suspended over a city.
Scent of damp and green things,
wild water escapes your mouth,
the bloom of it lilies a funeral, lilacs
a tomorrow. *Steady*, you breathe into
that unfastened sky. Tonight nothing breaks

against the earth. No growl. None. Now
you can think *button*, button it back up,
block out that future remembered.
Block out the worst of it.

Midrash on John 6:6

—*for E. R. Shaffer*

When you take my wrist, the string of my tongue is loosed
already above your wine-dark skin,

but you tell me your time has not yet come;
the physician will not give me meat. It is Friday,

and I laugh at the mermaid tattoo on your thigh, ask
if I might have fish. I am hungry and can bear no more

to be sent away without bread or scrip, but want
only to be gathered to you before either

of our heads can be served to another. Life is short.
The sea is close and storming. Between my teeth,

your thigh rolls slick and salted as the rocks
on the Pacific coast where I sat before you called me.

It was so cold there, but you are in raptures, asking
why it is so hot to have to hold back.

Again, I edge toward the wine-dark sea,
but you pull me up by numbered hairs, gasping.

Behind the mermaid, I can see them all: the thronging,
famished crowds; Jesus, breaking loaves;

Peter, full-bellied and wide-eyed
as he beholds the Christ; clever Thomas,

lean as his stylus, not a crumb in his beard but gorging
on every word; and John—beautiful John—

with his eyes on every slip of his master's robes,
every flash of dusk-kissed shoulder

revealed at the lifting of a fish, realizing
he will never be whole without this hunger again.

The Longing to Be Held

I want a shipping container home. I want a shipping container pool.
I want a shipping container pool inside a shipping container home.
I want a shipping container home and shipping container pool
inside a shipping container. I want that shipping container
on a shipping container barge, floating down a shipping container river
between bright blue shipping containers on shipping container shores.
I want those shipping containers on a shipping container continent,
inside a shipping container world, within a shipping container universe,
with tiny shipping container stars. I want to be plucked up by god,
swayed and rocked gently in walls of corrugated steel.

The world has not been cruel to him yet

so he brings leaves to construction workers
at the park, holds them out like treasures
anyone would be glad to take. The world
has not been cruel to him yet, so he lifts his
blue-beaded wrist up to everyone we pass, asking,
“Do you like my bracelet?” and the only possible
answer is: yes. The world has yet to be cruel to him,
so he believes there are only two types of people—
good and bad—and the bad ones aren’t real.
The world has not been cruel to him, so when he
can’t sleep, we list out all the people who love him
and when we run out of names, he tells me that
the trees love him. Saturn loves him. The sky loves him too.
And when he falls asleep on my shoulder,
I thank the world for staying soft for him.
For giving us a little longer.
For not being cruel to him
just yet.

Every Grave Starts as a Hole

Somewhere in Northern MP, on a street where the pavement sweats
like skin, my brother is gone.

& my mother is drunk again.

She kneels by the garden & plants the same dead things over & over.
A matchstick, a chicken bone, the bracelet he made her in fourth grade.
Her nails are black crescents. She says, This is where boys go
when they run too far.

The night he didn't come home, she kissed me on the head.
Said, You're my only one now, but her lips tasted
like rot, & I knew she didn't mean it.

The kitchen was full of knives.

The next morning, she braided her hair so tight,
her forehead gleamed like wet stone.

She spent hours by the roadside, pulling weeds, waiting
for a car that wouldn't bring him back. I think she
wanted a new boy to bury, something fresh to grieve.

She said, *Everything in this house smells like him*
& set his sheets on fire.

I told her, Mom, you're losing it.

She said, *No, baby, I lost it the day you both were born*

In the courtyard, I light the lamp.
Mother sits beside me, chanting his name—
but in pieces, breaking it open like a pomegranate.

When she's done, she pours ghee into the flame.
I ask her if it hurts to pray for the same thing twice.
She says, *Ask the river if it hates the monsoon.*

The Facilities Technician

The fans are gone.
When the utility cart climbs the switchback ramp
to the sixth-level concourse,
there are low-wage workers here, hired for the day—
growling leaf blowers strapped to their backs—
middle-aged men
who know what it is to start again.

The blown dust stings my eyes,
furrows my nose as I circle
toward a line of dumpsters.
The air is thick with boiled hotdogs,
nachos, beer.

I'm the first to the corral with my load.
As I open the gate,
the tension pinches my thumb.

It bruises.
Days later, I bruise the nail again
when a clamp gives out in my hands.
They pair like a butterfly—
brown and blue.

A plastic clamp isn't meant for abuse,
and I've torqued it past its limit,
straining to wrestle a bleacher into place.
Both its jaws break—
its resolve bursts at once,
its maw gaping at me, silent.

I sweep the mottled debris,
toss the springs,
the sheared nylon feet,
and stow its spine for the scrap pile.

Our Hike in Heavy Snow

*"Footmarks diverging," Miroslav Holub, "And what's new"
and, of course, after Robert Frost*

Whoever it was had come to the fork
and without any seeming indecision

headed in both directions at once,
the right footprints, quickly beginning to fill,

turning to hurry along the stream,
the impressions of a left boot, getting faint,

following the sign to the fire tower,
each foot hopping along, we guessed,

whoever it was of two minds
having split up as we split up,

each of us tracking half of a person,
trying to catch up, great flakes of snow

continuing to fall, those footprints
leading to where they disappeared,

the wind picking up, our texts disagreeing
about when and where to meet.

After His Death, I Search for My Father in Churches

I look for him in organ pipes and stained glass, in rigid pews and hymnals' soft paper, in balconies and daises, in the smell of wood and the echo of my own footsteps, behind the confessional's carved windows and in the candles' glowing memories, in the dry basin expecting holy water and in the arched ceiling expecting song. I seek him in the silence a church offers, like the silence he offered the Church when he removed his collar. I find him in the space between what we have and what we want, in the space between what we had and what we gave away.

Reading Room

I'd like to bite through my tongue.

I'd like to see what it feels like

to bite

through my tongue.

I'd like to see

if it swells if I bite

through my tongue, if my teeth

are sharp enough

to split muscle down

the middle, I'd like to

bite through my

tongue. I want to

taste iron, see I'm

teeming with mutated

beta chains; all this inherited

deficiency. If it walks like a duck and it

quacks like a duck. Perhaps, I can proffer

myself the requisite nutrients

to thrive if I bite

through my tongue. I am nauseated

and my eyelid is twitching, this happens

more and more. Call it

a tick. An itch. A scream.

Today, I looked up

“how to reset the nervous system.”

I moved to check the card catalogue.

No one mentioned that those

have gone extinct.

My mother keeps one
as a coffee table. Perhaps,
there is a restart button on the bottom
of the tongue. I'd like to
begin again. I'd like to donate
the ability to speak. It hasn't done much
for me, aside from render compliance
mandatory. If I am nothing
but gums, though, then
does the attic open? Does it come
with an oversized armchair? How about
a lamp? Warm light? There's no talking
in the library. I tried to ask the cat first,
and then a loose thread on a sweater sleeve

(I didn't have
a friend left to call, and my daddy, well
he died quite a long time ago)—

Anyway, neither answered.

Anyway, this is a riddle,

and it goes something like this:

hush, little baby.

don't say a word.

Mama's gonna—

Smile, now, and a mouth filled, wet.

Metallic. Strong teeth. Red grin.

'Vocabularies, liturgy, phonology, and etymology'

—from the *Canki Sutta*

I would have myself say it *gill-o-tin*—
as if expelled with bubbles from the breathing
apparatus of a hardy American fish,
throat full of water—but my bougie bent
demands it be chopped short in the middle
of my strained mouth, shorn of its superfluous
l-sound, *ghee-o-teen*, pronounced to please
a status-seeking suburban middle class,
the way public execution was made more
endurable by the pleas of a sensitive
and upwardly mobile doctor,
born to *Madame Guillotin*,
her labor vexed by the overheard
screams of a poor Parisian
tortured on the breaking wheel,

so raised her son to embrace
a morbid cause. What a reformer
he must have seemed,
this man of science and mercy
who patiently flayed the practice
of breaking bodies on a wheel—
so unappealing as metaphor,
not to mention managerially unsound,
viewed against the simplicity
of swiftly severing heads. His success
was absolute, chaining his proud
patronymic to the triumph of a better
death machine, and though he lobbied
to change its name, distance himself
from that gruesome legacy,
the wheel rolls on, *monsieur docteur*,
and we're nothing beneath the butchering
birth of a word.

Napkin Parable

I was taught to tuck my napkin
in my lap as soon as I'm seated.

But at the Altoona diner where I eat
most Tuesdays, a new server sees

the bare flatware and brings another napkin.
On her forearm: a tattoo with birth

and death years too close together—
the saddest math. Rain sluices the windows

like stretchmarks. The next booth is a still life
of juice glasses and sticky plates waiting

to be bussed. Trucks hiss by on Route 22.
Another napkin, then another. My lap

is a safe landing pad for anything
that might befall us.

Sick Time

She didn't want to go to work that day.
That is, more so than other days. She went
of course. She couldn't figure out a way
to use an absence code for "discontent."

She couldn't tell a lie, she never could,
so how could she legitimize her need
to sit alone and watch the neighborhood
awaken through her window, and to read

the street signs she could see from where she sat,
which she had known for years but never seen
as text before, or to finally notice that
the swale out in the median was green

with growth from last week's rain, or how the crows
conferring on the wires above the street
seemed calm and thoughtful in their dawn repose,
or how the neighbor's cat could not compete

with the tiniest wren, darting around
the princess tree before it flew away,
or how the rising symphony of sound
incantated the coming of a day.

In Maine, A Park Ranger Tells Us that We are Experiencing Heavy Fog, Not Rain

I watch the way my dad eats
his peach— unashamedly,

right down to the prickly core.
That's one thing I've always admired:

his lack of concern
for how others perceive him.

Channeling his nonchalance,
I work my shirt over my head

and walk towards the crisp Acadian water.
We are experiencing rain-like fog. The park

ranger says, these are *just* dew droplets,
they will not be classified as rain

until the diameter of the drops increase in size.
Up to .5 millimeters, "standard rain classification."

Has anyone ever lost themselves
in this and emerged anew? Anyone

other than a trans person? Since we lost
ourselves at a young age, before

the blur of going under and waking up
with a surgically modified body

that adds ten years to our life.
Low tide never seems to be at the right time,

but that doesn't matter
when collecting reasons to stay

alive. Does everyone worry
about growing up

to be like their parents? I'll be like my dad.
Bushy eyebrows and choosing clothes for comfort,

but I'll always leave
a little of the soft fruit

around the pit.

The Brown Sack

—*after van Gogh, 'Self Portrait with Pipe,' 1886*

each of us carries behind
a long brown sack cinched
tight filled with regret
for whatever we can't abide

when the burden becomes
too large to suffer
lay it in the road kick it
in the tenderest part make it
cry in pain

then fasten your tie
about your neck light
your pipe comb your hair
& sit very still for
as long as you can bear

Wake

Under an old coaling tower
by track scars in Bartlesville
we drink flame, dance
out the last drop, then spit
into a dirt circle.

Nothing happens—too glossed
to see any ghosts we bring,
but we laugh all the same,
that laugh you find in the meal
after a funeral.

Shroom says this tower never
got used. I ask *What do you call this?*
From a street away—
firecrackers and screaming
kids slap the night sky.

Just After My Mumbled Lord's Prayer

But before the trance that is childhood sleep,

 laughter filtered back from the grown-ups
playing cards in the living room, my grown-ups,

their cadence of familiar voices like weights

 on my eyelids, some discussion of the last trick,
what each thought their partner was up to

(tricks and partners, I knew that much),

 clink of ice cubes in glasses, an aunt's trill
taking the voice of some long-ago cousin,

rat-a-tat-tat of cards being shuffled, fresh cards,

 that new deck with mysterious birds, the one
I'd seen this morning, still plastic wrapped,

the deck I knew was special, waiting for tonight,

 the wrapping I knew I should not unwrap
even though it looked like a toy – I was learning,

not everything in this world was meant for me.

And in that vale of pre-sleep, my ears
the last to depart the day, it would not be truthful

to say I felt safe in my room with its night-light —
the concept of being unsafe was foreign,
it would have had to be explained to me,

heir to this house filled with maiden great-aunts,
the clomp-clomp of old lady shoes on back stairs
restful as surf sounds, each wave so unique

yet blending to a whole same as these card game
noises tonight usher me into sleep's realm,
clatter of the shuffle, silence of the deal.

In the Archives of Enchantment

Once again, knowing I mustn't
overstay, jumpy as a burglar
with an ear out for every
upstairs thump, I've come.

Porridge bowls, cracks browned
first with use, and now longer
disuse; the chairs, broken-legged,
precarious; the quilts on the beds,
threadbare.

Three wishes in the kettle bottom
like dried peas; rust-bitten axe
playing dead by the door; wolf's grin
blackening on the hearth.

I touch the oven and shudder.

A trail of petrified breadcrumbs wanders
white as blindness through a field
where the woods once were.

All these years and nothing has
touched them: no bird, no beast,
no breeze. To think how often I've
followed them here in memory,
found myself eating them in dreams.

Apparition at the Edge of the World

Hawks cry. The penned dog barks.
Breath breaks the bud of silence,
and the murmur of leather on stone
echoes my ordinary sorrow.

Yesterday's small cruelties
are forgiven under weedy clouds
that crest and fold like river waves.

Last night, a long-ago lover died.
When I finally slept, a dissonant apparition
with her face reminded me
I sleep on the edge of the world
where sooner or later everyone falls off.

She and I were feral cats, the ones
left by summer people who thought pets
were seasonal like bathing suits. We swam
in the clamorous dark, carnival calliope
and bare-bulbed lights in the distance.

When she asked me to move away with her
I asked her to stay with me.

Now, I walk as though I swim this hour—
sink as a wave knocks me under. I surface,
take that first breath,
the one that lets you know you won't drown.

Hawks After Dawn

Hawks cry, hoarse edge splits sky
and part the once-baled field spikey with ryegrass
and timothy. They land on the cross beams of power lines,
on the high masts of expressway lights, ignore
the hard shells of cartops. Redtails scan miles from
the highest branch of cottonwood plunge for mouse,
sweep deep and low over grass-tips for snakes.
No cloud of wings or chorus of discrete notes. Wingspan
tip to tip, torso from beak-point to tail feathers flash
a cross-like shadow worthy of a son of God. When a pair
mate, both build the nest— sometimes two or
three in different trees. They choose the one most able
to cup life—feathered and waiting to fly like any litany,
like the eager, piercing prayer every wind begs to carry.

Variations in Stain

I liked you best in red; your blush a sheer I could part and find, yes, not a window, but the night sky in a bowl which asked of me, drink with two hands. Harrow us, it begged in so's, with the narrow of thy throat. And so the bight built I as a chapel of bitten, and the light announced in sheds this color pressed like lilac, like Bergerac, into the flesh of lips and hands. A looping treble, a triptych bleeding or just a party trick. This tasting or staining. This rubbing or painting. The finger and tongue. These brief paths of know wear all the undone.

Harriet

She is crawling in my womb,
clawing for the exit. She
chokes on the pill
I swallow daily to lock her in.
Tiny toes scrape at my walls,
kick the breath out of me.
Stubborn, like me, she is always
screaming *Let me out! Let me out!*

Her name lumps in my throat,
slices the tip of my tongue.
Harriet, I whisper.
You'll kill us both.
I bleed her out monthly,
to protect her.

Her tears sting on my cheeks,
leave stains on my sheets,
Grief for what I've never held
folds me over. My husband keeps
her name like a secret and I realize
I've never written her name before.
Now she is in ink, drying,
trying to exist.

Coral

Coral curled around coral, a cork-
screw broken from what holds,

from where it is held, broken from
water, lifted from salt, washed up

to a ledge on a ridge in the center
of a mass of land where traces

of water are traced on rocks
arranged on the banks— carved

coins with a skeletal value.
Memory holds everything

together. In a shattering,
memory holds. A bony

structure becomes one
built from many into a wall

of coral. Coral, a color,
adorns the neck of a child

standing covered in sand,
the meaning being to stand

at the edge of being and reach
beyond standing, into the past,

past being ocean, or a future
of river and land. Memory pulls

our bone-torn forms, our mortal
coils, out of the ocean and onto

its edge. Land pushed ocean
into river, a river over which

we skip the water-marked stones
that forever collect on its edge.

Face-Off

or, Summiting Mount Pilchuck

My bowl of ramen had a goofy face,
chashu grinning up at me, squishy orange
eyeballs framed by egg-white, no pupils,
hair twirled around my chopsticks.

I need to know: were the parked cars angry,
and if so, were they angry at me? One's
headlight eyes narrowed; another's
mouth contorted, teeth bared.

But with the face of this mountain underfoot I can't
make out its expression. At cerebral elevation,
my nose bleeds, ramen broth dripping
down my chin, coloring the bushes red.

Morning Reflections

On morning walks, I'd see my nonagenarian
neighbor on a small stool filling bird feeders with Nyjer

or sunflower seed. She'd smile but not speak,
blue veins and bony rake on the back of her hand

clutching sweater to throat. Now she's died
and the white farmhouse, dark on the horizon,

mothers its emptiness and dust. Apple trees
in the yard pretend at black-sticked sleep.

Dirty tubes of air, the birdfeeders sway in the wind,
and a stone bird bath, cold and grave, stands alone.

The hood of her Honda peeks out the garage window
like a trapped cat hungry to suss out songbirds

inhaled by bushes and shrubs skirting the foundation.
A basketball pole's bare hoop bends over the driveway,

cracked and black, and a low oak limb creaks
below scarred bark from a chain swing's bite. It speaks

of jeans with grass-stained knees, buffalo plaid coats,
sons grown and gone. But it's the windows, mostly.

The way daylight uses their glass to reflect. The way
pulled shades look like closed eyelids that have overslept.

The Grammar of Safety

Avoid becoming an object
especially the direct one.

In *the mother hit the child*
it's safer to be the subject.

If *hit* were a noun it might be
a good thing, a top-ten tune
home run swing, but here it's
a verb that leads to others—
reddden, hide, cry, don't
touch. Then the adverbs
arrive *gingerly, awkwardly*
and a pack of adjectives
ready to modify the *child*:
bruised, ashamed, horrified.

If only you could've been
a coordinating conjunction,
the *and* between Mom *and*
some other noun, preferably
Dad, but no, it's a subordinate
role—all *ifs, whens, thoughts*—
until your fleeing at eighteen
tugs the independent clause
down a rung, leaves *the mother*
a fragment, unable to lead the
simple, compound, complex
around. A hand sweeps her,
prepositionally, *off of; away*
from, beyond your pages.

What would you say to thirst if you could say anything?

It's true I am sometimes afraid of you.

I have this dry grass in my throat.

I have this residue of salt.

I wonder if I could just hang out with you
for a little while – you with your constant talk
about *life life life* and what it requires.

I see how much you love the word *necessary*.

It's possible you love me too,
maybe the way a siren loves an emergency.

I see how you look at me.

It's true I don't always enjoy learning.

I have this rasp in my chest.

What is it I need again? Remind me.

Four-Letter Words

A sudden rush of white wings
over my head in the woods,
an owl blithely signaling
its presence, alighting
on a branch mere
feet in front of me,
dark socketed eyes
full of whatever I might
choose to see or not see.
This mind suddenly full
of four-letter words:
coin, body, life,
what I might do with these.

I think of Eurydice,
the Netflix version,
deprived of a coin
in the mouth, refused entry
to the underworld.
It makes me think
of all the bodies
in this life, deprived
of basic coin, the ability
to move forward or even
to go back to anything
like safety, never mind
a real life, a wanted one,
forced to use the body
like the coin it really is
until it's simply spent
on a hostile shore.

This story too large,
too everlasting,
I look to the owl.
Its cape of feathers
mottled light and dark,
its deep stillness
a tease, as though
we could ever claim
what appears to be
all the time in the world
to consider, holding time
at bay with just a look,
those ink-black eyes
like coins holding all
that lies within,
that lies ahead.

About the Contributors

Lisa Marie Oliver is the author of *Birthroot* (Glass Lyre Press). Her poems can be found in *Harbor Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Parentheses*. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her son and a kitchen spider named Carnelian.

Gail Griffin has four books of nonfiction, most recently *Grief's Country: A Memoir in Pieces*. Her debut poetry collection *Omena Bay Testament* won the Two Sylvias Wilder Prize as well as a Pushcart Prize. An unmarried cat lady, she works happily along the genre border in southwest Michigan.

Elizabeth Kuelbs writes at the edge of a Los Angeles canyon. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Scientific American*, *Inflectionist Review*, *Bear Review*, *Literary Mama*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and her chapbooks include *Little Victory* and *How to Clean Your Eyes*.

Reyzl Grace is a poet/librarian with work in *Room, Rust & Moth*, *So to Speak*, and other magazines, as well as an editor for *Psaltery & Lyre*. She lives in Minneapolis with her novelist girlfriend, arguing over which of them is the better writer. (It's her girlfriend.)

Poet, translator, essayist, and Fulbright scholar, **Rachel Neve-Midbar's** collection *Salaam of Birds* (Tebot Bach 2020) won the Patricia Bibby First Book Prize. She is also the editor of the anthology *Stained: creative writing about menstruation* (Querencia Press 2023). Her work has been published widely.

Katie Massa Kennedy is a Los Angeles-based writer whose work has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *Good River Review*, and *Biography.com*. Other writing credits include variety TV shows and speeches for the March for Science. She received her MFA from the Naslund-Mann School of Writing at Spalding University.

Ziqr is grieving, yearning, and hoping. Their works have appeared in places like *Scholastic*, *Rattle*, and *Trampset*, among others.

Jordan Adams is a poet based outside Madison, Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife and two children. His poetry often explores themes of myth, labor, and the quiet life. *Rust and Moth* marks his first publication.

Allison Mei-Li lives in Southern California, where she is a mother, writer, and speech-language pathologist. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Coffee + Crumbs*, *Ink + Marrow Lit*, *the VC Reporter*, *Wildscape*, *MER Literary*, and elsewhere. She writes a monthly poetry series at allisonwrites.substack.com.

Born in Missouri and raised in North Dakota, **William Aarnes** taught in DC and South Carolina before retiring to Manhattan. His fourth and latest collection of poems is *The Hum in Human* (Main Street Rag, 2022).

Hannah M. Matzecki is a writer, mother, and the editor of *Kitchen Table Quarterly*. Her poetry has appeared in *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Red Rock Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*, as well as on any refrigerator with those little word magnet tiles. A third-generation Angeleno, she lives in Los Angeles with her family and two demanding cats.

Originally from Minneapolis, **Nicole Desjardins Gowdy** now lives in the foothills outside Los Angeles. Her writing has been shortlisted for the West-Word Micro Fiction Prize and has appeared in *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *West Trade Review*, *MoonPark Review*, *Literary Mama*, and more.

Blair Benjamin's writing has appeared in *Atticus Review*, *North American Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Storm Cellar*, *Sugar House Review*, *Tampa Review*, *The Madison Review*, and *The Threepenny Review*, among others. He is the Founder and Director of the Studios at MASS MoCA, a residency for artists and writers at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Erin Murphy is author or editor of more than a dozen books, most recently *Fluent in Blue* (2024) and *Human Resources* (forthcoming from Salmon Poetry). Her work has appeared in *Ecotone*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *The Best of Brevity*, *Best Microfiction 2024*, and anthologies from Random House, Bloomsbury, and Bedford/St. Martin's.

Lee Collins is a queer poet who utilizes their experiences as a transgender individual to heavily inspire their work. Lee received a BEA in English from Lesley University in 2023 and has now moved on to working towards their MFA in Poetry at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

David Rosenthal is a public school teacher in Berkeley, California. He has contributed to *Rattle*, *HAD*, *Rust & Moth*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Teachers & Writers Magazine*, and others. He's been a Nemerov Sonnet Award Finalist and Pushcart Nominee. He's the author of *The Wild Geography of Misplaced Things* (Kelsay Books).

Matt Cariello will publish two collections of poetry in 2025: *Colloquy on Mad Tom* (Bordighera Press) and *Self Portrait in the Dark* (Finishing Line Press), in which "The Brown Sack" appears. These books follow three other collections: *The Empty Field*, *Talk*, and *A Boat That Can Carry Two*. He's a senior lecturer in the English department at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

Rupert Fike's second collection *Hello the House* (Snake Nation Press, 2018) was named one of the "Books All Georgians Should Read" by The Georgia Center for the Book. Recent publications include *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Sun*, *Main Street Rag*, *Kestrel*, *Scalawag*, and *The Flannery O'Connor Review*.

Seth Copeland's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol*, *The Shore*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *South Dakota Review*. Since 2016, he has edited *petrichor*. Seth is originally from Oklahoma and now lives and teaches in southeastern Wisconsin.

Raised, educated, and then educated some more in New Jersey (PhD Rutgers, 2005), **Julian Koslow** left academia to take care of a child with special needs. His poems can be found in *The Pinch*, *Sugar House Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *SRPR*, among others.

Melanie Perish's work appeared in *Sequestrum*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Calyx*, *Ravens Nest*, *Persimmon Tree*, and other publications. Nevada Humanities featured her on *Double Down Blog*. Collections include *Passions & Gratitudes* (Black Rock Press) and *The Fishing Poems* (Chapbook, Meridian Press.) *Foreign Voices*, *Native Tongues* (Single Wing Press) is her newest book.

Kale Hensley is a West Virginian by birth and a poet by faith.

Megan Eralie-Henriques is a writer from the Mountain West transplanted to Minnesota. She teaches College English, pets every cat she sees, and is Editor in Chief of *The Turning Leaf Journal*. Find more of her work in *Hearth & Coffin*, *Exponent II*, and others.

Carolyn Guinzio's most recent publications are *A Vertigo Book*, winner of The Tenth Gate Prize and the Foreword Indies Award for Poetry Book of the Year, and the sequence *Meanwhile in Arkansas*, winner of the Quarterly West Chapbook Prize. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and many other journals.

Franziska (Franzi) Roesner a professor of computer science at the University of Washington. She was a poet first, though, and has returned to poetry recently. Her poetry has appeared or will appear in *Choeofpleirn Pres*, *Eunoia Review*, and *The Marbled Sigh*. She lives in Seattle with her husband, two daughters, and one remaining cat.

Jill Michelle is the author of *Underwater* (Riot in Your Throat, 2025) and *Shuffle Play* (Bottlecap, 2024) and winner of the 2023 NORward Prize for Poetry. Her newest work is forthcoming in *The Florida Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, and *Sinking City*. She teaches at Valencia College in Orlando.

Ken Craft teaches at York County Community College in Maine. His poetry has appeared in *The Writer's Almanac with Garrison Keillor*, *The Pedestal*, *Spillway*, and *Pushcart Prize XLIX: Best of the Small Presses* (2025 Edition). He is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Reincarnation & Other Stimulants*.

Susannah Sheffer's newest poetry collection, *The Stone Tries to Understand the Hands*, will be published by Cornerstone Press in early 2025. Her previous collections include *Break and Enter* (2021) and *This Kind of Knowing* (2013). She lives in Western Massachusetts.

Dagne Forrest has recent work in *The Inflectionist Review*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *The New Quarterly*, *december magazine*, *Unlost*, and *On the Seawall*. She belongs to *Painted Bride Quarterly's* senior editorial and podcast teams. Her debut chapbook will be published by Baseline Press in spring 2025.

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