

# RUST & MOTH

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## **[Where was God? I dead-man floated]**

Where was God? I dead-man floated in the deep end, staring  
at the nowhere of the bottom, sterile blue. Why was the skin  
on my mother's fingers always scaly & breaking, as if with worry?  
Worry rustled like a lake in the dark. Up the mountain silently

went Isaac behind his father. The stillness of spiders on my way  
downstairs, like coiled springs, & how their webs startled when  
they did. What thread between a spider & God & what was I  
when I crushed one? Grass through sidewalk cracks. Through

Sinai in the back of a jeep, Sinai wide & sun-blasted. We stopped  
where maybe Mt. Sinai's bare spine rises to see what they say  
is the burning bush, ancient bramble I barely remember. But an hour  
away at Dahab: flaring oranges & neon blues, through windows

over our faces we could see soft white tinged yellow, wafer-thin  
when they turned, wavering in the coral which still flourished then.

## Losing the Cat

—after W.S. Merwin

In the wind-beguiled lavender where the deer  
saunter on spindled limbs, between the ponderosa pines

and long grass, we call out for our missing pet.  
The sun warps the hills in a sharp blue haze

that pulls the ground heavenward for miles.  
When I split off into the brush, my son screeches and

a magpie jolts from its perch, wings terror-bent  
against the sky. I walk further into the hawk-full

hills but now both children are crying, ousting all  
the wild things from their dirt holes and branches.

Something stirs in me: how easy it might be  
to disappear—into the jaws of a bear, the memory

of a creek. We place food bowls out each night, watch  
a bobcat slink past the eye of our deck camera, its tail

a trail vanishing into the night. Morning comes  
like it does, and the bowls are empty, draped

in a small blessing of mist. It's been a week now,  
and the children have stopped asking after it.



Just a week, but I guess I'm fickle, too—the light  
early with swallows frivolous in their darting.

The days are long and strange with absence and  
what chooses to return. I might have kept the door closed

had I known how fast something can bolt from  
its bed, its life, its home. I step back into the hills,

no calling this time, just the sound of grass remembering  
a small and wild thing that once passed through.

## Trashcan Lining as A Bed Of Violets

i squat under the kitchen moon,  
in my white dress, the salmon's throat  
blooming around my hand.  
it is a funny feeling to feel organs  
cool against skin—a late night kiss  
of sorts. i spin a ribbon out of some black hole,  
still wet, still twitching, egg sacs tangled  
in blood silk. a pulse is barely a pulse.  
a pulse is barely anything at all.  
he lies in the bedroom, waiting  
for his dinner on a tray, his wife  
counting stars in minnesota. layers pool  
on the floor, my hair a dark and tender waterfall,  
my nape a mere spoonful of milk.  
i am learning to empty myself out  
with all the gentleness of a soft egg,  
that sprouts legs and swims away  
as someone else's love child. in a distant stream,  
she uses her shell as a cushion, and no one  
forces their way in. so i make a shroud  
for her, pale and stillborn, sleeping beauty  
laying down on a bed of violets.  
some days when i dream, i am still a girl.

## December

—the mint green birthday cake we passed in slo-mo  
on the lap of a man on a park bench under the shade  
of a Jacaranda tree in full purple bloom. It must have been

winter, the window pane cold against my cheek  
on the bus ride home. Across the aisle, a girl in pink gloves  
blowing soap bubbles into the air: a hundred little rainbows

bursting against the roof, the seats, the windshield. Maybe  
it was a dream—I remember reaching only in time for the sky  
skipping with house swifts, the sun setting. That month

the lemon tree we planted three years ago finally gave fruit:  
do you remember the thirty six yellow moons  
sleeping on the kitchen counter?

## Blur

You crest the hill, chin down, rifle cradled  
across your chest. Your palm lies flat

against the stock, shielding it with the same reverence  
as you held your son. Last night,

you tucked him cheek to breast, cupped his head  
in the hearthlight. His soft whorls of hair

blurred to suggestion & you swayed in front of the logs,  
as if praying his sleep might cure in the heat.

Since his mama's been gone, you return  
with your game bag empty, every trip a meditation

that one loss cannot erase another. Your son  
bubbles in my arms & I watch you from the window,

hunching—a man hauling the horizon on his back.  
Sunset stuccos the sky with the embers of last night's fire.

Light glares along the barrel, less like a breath,  
& more like a gasp—sharp enough to shatter bone.

## Sisyphus the Silverfish

Every time I enter the room,  
it's crawling around the inner perimeter  
of the light fixture like a compass,  
its iridescent armour always in my periphery.

I wonder if it can climb the incline upwards,  
if it knows its name is Sisyphus.

Its teardrop of a midgut  
pushing a boulder of lint and dust  
around the source of light that it seeks to avoid.  
Does the firebrat dream?

It gnawed its way into my dream.  
It broke out of the saccharine lamp  
and became a real fish,  
brilliant-scaled and swimming through air.

Tonight, I will unscrew the light fixture  
and liberate it to the great outdoors,  
say *it's okay Sisyphus, you don't have to pretend  
to be happy anymore.*

## **It Was the Year**

It began in Waikiki,  
the snow storm in summer  
the heat wave in winter.

It came after we visited a town  
of seven thousand emeralds  
and slept in a desert of pearls.  
It was the year I was charged with trespassing.  
It was the month without a clock.

Therapy, they told me,  
will set your topsy-turvy life right,  
erase the snow globe of confusion,  
plow the sand from your brain.

Instead, the night wind napped  
and a saint sailed in through a swarm of bees  
to turn my jambalaya life  
back round.

The saint was a baby,  
a shapeshifter, a midnight walker  
taller than a tree,  
smaller than a frog.

She jumped from my pocket  
and threw her jeweled coat  
over my noontime gale.

## The Arborist's Embrace

She could not rise to stand, there,  
at the restaurant. Even gripping  
her cane. Age, bulk, and pain  
rooted her to the armless oaken chair.

Patient companions tried their best,  
with a boost. She could not budge.  
*I'm so sorry*, she said, staring  
into a thicket of helplessness.

One friend boldly approached  
the bar, where sturdy young men—  
*Arcas Bros. Tree Service* stamped  
on their shirts and green caps—

had planted themselves to swig beers,  
swap stories. She tapped  
the shoulder of the quiet one.  
“Would you be so kind...?”

He followed to their table.  
“Hope I don't smell like pine sap,”  
he said, then, “Okay, up we go”  
and in a split



*oh breathe your breath into my book of changes*

second opened his arms encircled her  
ample trunk and pressing close lifted  
her easily and she rose upward eyes wide  
and stood shedding rings of years

*what we have been, or now are,  
we shall not be tomorrow.*

As they shuffled out the door, to the car,  
her friend asked how she was doing, now.  
*Wonderful*, a dryad replied, moonglow  
lighting her way, breeze stirring her leafy hair.

*Note: indented lines are from Ovid's Metamorphoses.*

## **Mom Watches Reruns of George Lopez at Night, While Dad Sits in the Garage Getting High**

In bed, I practice the soft blinks  
of forgetting all the bad  
and deliberately mean things  
I have done today—the sparkly lavender  
lip gloss I stole from Sears  
and the bloody nose I gave my brother  
when I pushed  
his face into the carpet.

Through the walls, I hear him speaking softly  
to the cat that has nudged open  
his bedroom door, patting  
the spongey yellow comforter  
draped over his bed.

When I have plucked up  
enough courage, I will tip-toe across the dark  
landing from my room to his, hoping  
that he has forgiven me, and ask to curl  
up on the floor beside his bed, or if he'll allow,  
beside him under the blankets.

After we are done constructing  
a tall enough wall built from pillows  
and his favorite stuffed crocodile  
to protect us from whatever evils exist  
outside his blue racecar-shaped  
bed, I will flip over and ask for him  
to hold me, and he will snake  
his smaller arm over mine.

## on first encountering a monarch butterfly as a child

I have drawn it ten times in magic  
marker, rendered the black  
webbing of its wings a thick frenzied

asterisk splattered on a pumpkin canvas  
with my kindergartener-clutch, and now  
it is here in the schoolyard:

if every cathedral's stained glass  
window was ochre; if every king  
and queen were brush-footed,

sipped mead through curled  
proboscis, and knew the way, though it be  
thousands of miles long,

then I would be their page, following  
with fists full of colored pencils, and pockets  
bursting with milkweed.

## **Near Palm Beach**

After dark  
we listen to muted boat engines  
on the waterway,  
watch the drawbridge rise  
and fall.

The stairs to your apartment  
are open toed like sandals,  
vibrating  
with each step.

Upon your threshold,  
insects reach a crescendo  
the moment you slip inside,  
alone.

## Her Obsessions

I wish I could love anything the way my mother loves my father.  
She confesses her love each time I see her, as though  
she hasn't already told me. She has a name for this love—  
her "obsessions." *But you've barely spoken to him in 20 years,*  
I remind her. It doesn't matter. She's abandoned all pretense now.  
All she has is truth. My father was singular. One light, one orbit.  
He was a god, she a goddess. At least in her mind, anyway.  
They say Alzheimer's chips away at your memories  
in reverse chronological order, with your earliest memories  
the last to go. But my mother will remember my father  
even when she doesn't remember her own parents.  
She'll hold onto him till the end, the way she clutches  
a brown couch pillow as she naps in early summer,  
the air conditioner rattling, gently shaking the apartment.

## Grocery List

My daughter asks about god  
while I make the grocery list  
and try not to rip it apart  
when there is a starving child  
on the screen in my pocket.  
I do not know why  
bad things happen  
but I do not think apples  
have anything to do with it.  
She isn't asking about  
bad things anyway –  
she wants to know  
where god lives.  
So do I. At the store  
I pick out galas  
that I will slice as thin  
as crescent moons  
she can sink her teeth into.  
How many slivers of the moon  
would it take to feed a country?  
The other night, we held hands  
up to the sky and almost grasped it.  
She believes we could  
if we keep trying.  
On the back of the list,  
my child has drawn a map.

## How Planes Stay In The Air

The strings are fine  
but immensely strong –  
above the clouds, they wait

for signals; lights from towers,  
all-clear on super-long-range-  
walkie-talkies. Concentrate,

then lift,  
smoothly does it – huge hands  
on the wooden cross-braces light

as dancers, wafting  
tins of human life across water  
peak and field.

It's monotonous work, this,  
but satisfying in the set down.  
The hot little scurrying

as each tin bursts open on the ground –  
hearts and plans spilling out  
over the tarmac. Sometimes

a trainee is heavy handed  
*put on your own oxygen mask*  
*before helping others.*



Occasionally, there's a minute loss  
of concentration, tangled  
strings and spiralling.

The chrysanthemum bloom of orange  
and grey gusting upward –  
enough to light their stunned, guilty faces.

## Dailiness

Harvey, the African crested porcupine,  
spent his formative years indoors  
and now gets stressed  
under the big open sky.

Maybe you've also felt overwhelmed  
by the bigness of the world—maybe you've let  
something small but sure hold you.

To help him adjust, his keepers  
are building a little porch so he can hang outside  
with the other porcupine  
who's all quills and sunshine.

Sometimes what holds us  
is choosing what we know  
instead of sunbathing with Potato Gregg.

And sometimes what nudges us  
is a small shift in dailiness:  
a gentle breeze, warm mulch,  
apple-slice snacking,  
fencepost scratching—

forgetting to look up  
until we do, and find the sky has yet to swallow us.

## Splitscreen: Skatepark

Teenagers kissing in the grass, lips locked.  
Burnt cigarette butts, bottle caps, punk rock.  
The noises skateboards make. The groans and grunts  
of skaters. The high-stakes tricks and stunts.

The grit. The hurt. The neverending quest.  
(She strokes his hair. His fingers find her breast.)  
The rancid air. The inner-city heat.  
Graffiti. Stickers. Sweat. (The salty-sweet

of interlocking tongues.) The sun's last breath  
on pink concrete. (They promise *until death...*)  
The blood. The ruined shoes. The broken decks.  
Three stunned pedestrians caught in a hex

of wonderment. The brief eternal high.  
(The lovers part, and do not say goodbye.)

## Medusa in the Time of Box Braids

This morning you almost choked  
on a shred of snake molt.  
It snuck into a spoonful of porridge,  
and you coughed it up before  
it became the embarrassing end  
of you. Scales scatter  
on your floorboards, cling  
like dust to your soles.

You were only thirteen. The gr nite  
of h m grow ng against khaki.

Scalp tight with day-old knotless  
braids. Blue tunic stiff over knees  
patched with tag tumbles.

Your feet dangled in the guidance  
counsellor's chair, the event  
clogging your throat.

First, only his name escaped.  
*P s d n.* Syllables grime-thick.

They asked, *Why were you*  
*in his office so late?*

The tr ce of h s gr zzl d  
h nds. Kn ckle h r a wood  
white with winter.

You left the room, pink-eyed.  
They cursed you *force ripe*.  
Cursed your hair *too long*  
and skirt *too tight*.

Your skin greened like a pear  
cut before soft. Twist tips  
grew hissing heads,  
forked tongues swinging  
at your waist.

You smothered them in satin  
rose-knotted. Their fangs  
tattered the headwrap.

Even now the hush-taunts  
keep you up on your pillow  
damp with venom. Every  
night you consider unveiling  
the bathroom mirror  
you hid in white silk,

letting your rotten-fruit  
flesh glaciare with stone.

Maybe then,  
lips cemented shut,  
they'll say  
*Taken too soon.*

## Order

Let's start with the entrails  
because so much is written

in the viscera. They call it nature,  
but where's the line? Genes turn

on, turn on us, or hold harmless.  
They call it nurture, but it's wind

and rain that stress seeds to sprout:  
post-traumatic transformation.

It takes a quarter century for our brains  
to turn mindful, half to grow a soul,

another quarter for the spirit.  
I don't know what happens

after that, but I'll guess leave-taking  
—unpredictable, uneven, inevitable,

like an Irish good-bye or Swedish death  
cleaning, fanning out our affairs like deck

chairs on a doomed vessel: a descent  
from exquisite particularity to cliché.

## Paper

On our first wedding anniversary, you gave me  
all the English counties on an antique map  
so I'd finally learn how this place fits together.  
You probably thought I'd have no more excuses,

but months later, I still haven't done my homework,  
still can't picture Hertfordshire or Kent,  
or tell you which sea Yorkshire touches.  
I say I'm waiting for you to frame it,

but two decades into this torrid affair  
with my adopted country, maybe I still enjoy  
my willful ignorance, tell myself it's charming  
to have to ask, *where exactly is that?*

You haven't had time to frame my present.  
Work keeps you busy looking at other maps  
whose contents I can't ask about,  
with enemy ships instead of pretty names.

And anyway, when you're here we're occupied  
with catching up on life. We sleep and cook,  
and ramble with the children, your slender hands  
unfolding fragile ordnance surveys, soft with use.

This morning, I miss your Englishness,  
maybe enough to finally lay that map out  
on the bedspread like a fresh new lover,  
learn the names with curious fingertips.

## The Art of Not Drowning

I used to think nice girls didn't get  
ordained, or want to, anyway.  
My friends confirmed this.

Besides, I liked my little waist,  
blonde waves, the prettiness  
of fitting in, my power to make

strong men well up by singing Bach.  
Nice girls went on the stage;  
we lived in liberated times.

But prayer's invitation lapped  
at my fingertips, the voice called out  
like water dripping on a stone,

pooling, gathering pressure.  
And at the laying on of hands,  
the bishop's words broke like a flood:

*Send down the Holy Spirit  
on your servant  
for the work of a priest*

and all around me fathers and mothers  
reached out to touch my shoulders  
and my head. I held my breath

until my palms had been inscribed  
with crosses, pressed with holy oil,  
and came up gasping, sobbed for joy.



## The Cost of Living

We can't afford to live where we live  
and now? Skip delivery for dinner,  
eat chips and salsa. Skip nights listening  
to the rhythmic organ and snare drum  
at the club in town. Ditch cable. Ditch  
satellite radio. Ditch the bourbon  
handmade in pre-soaked barrels.  
Don't need roses or fancy chocolate,  
either, even when desire burns for it.  
We cling to the crumbling bathroom tile,  
the cabinet that won't open because  
old buildings have to be spoiled  
with repairs and money, too.  
The economy of what we're willing  
to live without shifts and lists on the tide.  
In Florida, a hurricane re-arranges  
the shoreline, boardwalks and swimming  
pools drop into the water on both coasts.  
There is so much plenty in the world,  
but only other people have it. No one wants  
to share. I have cut another length  
from the bolt of this life and do not  
know where to put the seams,  
where my head and arms should go.

## **Did you know tragedy originally meant goat song**

because a collective of voices would rise  
together before the slaughter  
of a kid in the name of some ancient god  
or another? Blood has always accompanied  
sorrow whether it be at the hands of Agamemnon  
or Abraham. The ultimate test. Are you willing  
to kill, the grease of dark meat on your cheeks,  
the slick blood on your hands? How hungry  
are you? What are you willing to do  
to gain the favor of whatever god  
looms near, mouth open  
and ready to devour?

## **Wheeled into the OR, She Remembers the Pond**

How she taps to feel the dull thump  
of solid ice crowning cloudy water,

flinches at the siren call  
of hawk hunting hare,

strains to hear a twig snap,  
subtle susurrus of shifting wind,

fails to notice a curlicue of cracks,  
the sun slivering them deeper and deeper;

how she's left with no choice  
but to inch forward,

everything in her longing  
to reach the other side.

## Birthwort

If I talk about the inward aspects of a good bone  
I remember Nnewi & the mad dogs that roam there.

I want to speak on abortion, but my mother will sew  
My lips shut even if it is the last thing her frail hands

Can do. I remember the white light the first time I  
Nearly died, I guarded the pages of my life, careful

Not to spill what was inside or rip it somehow—  
Somehow I think it is the sickly smell of another day

Hovering over us like the tattered wings of a hawk.  
The small god that guards me is rum-hungry &

Chicken-famished; what it sounds like is a bird breaking  
Small twigs against brown skirted roofs. You do not know

How this small life of yours unfurls itself in your wake.  
How everything passes through it like loose buttonholes.

Everything about your life is theoretically correct but  
The monophony of your being here. I tell my mother about

My friend who did an abortion & was worried about  
Where the baby was at now; she said: *that youngin' brave*

*As hell, I hope God quietens the wild fire in her—*

I swing my legs like an anchor & wonder what it means

For God to quieten one's fire. I imagine my friend,

Wandering through a field laced with blood-stained hyacinths

Searching for a baby she did not know was not there,

Hair tipped with smoke & eyes hooked to the kite of heaven.

The inlaid chants of stiff-necked tulips & birthwort cheering

Her on. In that reverie, mother said: *hope you ain't 'that friend'?*

## Double Doors

After the vessel burst in my mother's brain,  
after she lay in the hospital for days,  
after her three weeks of rehab,  
we bundled her, still dazed and dizzy,  
into her winter coat  
and into her new wheelchair  
and down and out the double doors  
to the snow-lined walkway,  
where she said,  
*Oh!*

I stopped pushing, leaned around to see  
her face. *What is it? What's wrong?*  
She said it again, more slowly:  
*Ohhhhh*  
and touched her gloved hand to her cheek.  
*Is it your teeth?*  
She shook her head.  
She was looking past me,  
eyes distant, beginning to tear.  
*The air*, she said.  
*Fresh*  
*air.*

## Passage

What I recall from that autumn  
between girlhood and womanhood:  
the moon in the grey-flannel sky.

Not the harvest moon—swollen belly  
with its apricot tinge of ripeness.  
Not the blood moon either  
though blood would come.

But the waxing crescent, its long swayback,  
its lazy loins nearly reaching me,  
the languid swath of its light intent  
on touching my untouched body.

The moon as sky bridge,  
ineludible, before me.

## Finding Lake Lindsey's Dinosaur

When the GPS goes rogue and routes me  
through backwoods and boonies somewhere  
north of Brooksville, down unmarked roads  
populated with more cyclists and horse-drawn  
carriages than cars, I almost can't believe it

when I catch sight of the headless dinosaur.  
Its concrete bones and wire guts face the road  
like some decapitated cryptid, yet still it stands,  
the hindmost three-fifths of a brontosaurus,  
and inside me jets a rush of wild wonder like bats

pouring from hidden lofty rafters. Someone  
has strung a ghoulish menagerie of ghosts, witches,  
and skeletons along the cavern of its hollow belly  
for Halloween, feeding us drivers' curiosity  
for what lives inside our bones and inhabits

the things we will leave behind. When the road  
finally brings me to the first sign of civilization  
in the form of an unlit marquee that reads  
*CAR SHOW CORN BEEF CABBAGE*,  
where nearby the Seventh-day Adventist Church



touts that you should follow them on Facebook  
and even further on at the usual roadside curios—  
the bail bondsman billboards, the miniature ponies,  
the giant pink elephant with glowing eyes which  
nobody ever believes me about—my head is still

back there with the dino, weathering the sun  
like a Dinosaur World reject, and I feel feral  
thinking about the ghosts in my belly and what  
it must be like to remain facing forward for decades  
with our innermost, tenderest parts out first.

## Light-years

Sunshine answers prayer  
with astronomy, the science

of light-years pouring time  
backward through

my bedroom curtains, a way  
of gazing over my shoulder,

a way of feeling again—  
his fingers eager

in their reach for meaning,  
his lips tasting my stars.

We drank coffee in bed,  
our favorite weekend ritual,

his hands bringing our cups.  
We were settled then, routine

the clink of our spoons  
stirring the cream, my ease

watching him out the window,  
the gorgeous way his bicep

popped as he filled  
feeders, the way he stood

awaiting the music  
as song sparrows flew in.

Time gives us light  
in place of dying celestial

bodies, what our eyes  
see in the night sky,

a frail imprint of the shape  
someone used to be.

He used to be my ritual,  
my coffee with cream,

his tongue licking the rim  
of a mug.

Now in the whole universe  
no telescope can find his face.

## About the Contributors

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**Dan Alter** is the author of two collections of poetry, *My Little Book of Exiles* (Eyewear, 2002), winner of the Cowan Poetry Prize, and *Hills Full of Holes* (Fernwood, 2025). He is also the translator of *Take a Breath, You're Getting Excited* (Ben Yehuda, 2024), from the Hebrew of Yakir Ben-Moshe. His poems, reviews, and translations have been published widely. He works at the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at UC Berkeley.

**Rongfei Mu** is a full-time student and part-time poet based in Beijing, China. Her work has appeared in *Palette Poetry*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and elsewhere. When she's not writing depressing poetry, she is either dreaming up her next novel or obsessively rereading her favorite biographies of Robert F. Kennedy Sr.

**Megan Peak** received her MFA in Poetry from The Ohio State University, where she was former Poetry Editor at *The Journal*. Her first book of poetry *Girdlom* won the 2018 Perugia Press Prize from Perugia Press and 2019 The John A. Robertson Award for Best First Book of Poetry from the Texas Institute of Letters.

**Vismai Rao's** poems appear in *Salamander*, *RHINO*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Pithehead Chapel*, *Poetry Wales*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and elsewhere. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and the Orison Anthology. She serves as Poetry Editor for *The Night Heron Barks & Ran Off with the Star Bassoon*. She lives in Auroville, India.

**Lorrie Ness** writes from a rural corner of Virginia. Her work has appeared in *Palette Poetry*, *THRUSH*, *Trampset*, *Sky Island Journal*, and many others. She has published two collections at Flowstone Press, *Heritage & Other Pseudonyms* and *Anatomy of a Wound*. Her work has been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net Awards.

**Tallulah Howarth** is a Leeds-based multidisciplinary creative and poet. They are particularly passionate about Polish jazz, foraging, and archives. She was highly commended in the Hammond House International Literary Prize (2024) and placed second in the Red Shed Poetry Competition (2025). Her work is observational and intimate.

**Lao Rubert** lives in Durham, North Carolina. Her poems are forthcoming or have appeared in *About Place Journal*, *Atlanta Review*, *Barzakh*, *Cider Press Review*, *Collateral*, *Mantis*, *Muleskinner*, *Poetry East*, *Spillway*, *The Avenue*, *The Marbled Sigh*, *Writers Resist*, and elsewhere. Rubert holds an MA in English Literature from Duke University.

**Jeanne Julian** is author of *Like the O in Hope* and two chapbooks. Her poems are in *Kakalak*, *RavensPerch*, *Gyroscope*, and elsewhere, and have won awards from *Reed Magazine*, *Comstock Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. Her book reviews appear in *Main Street Rag*. She lives in Maine.

**Olivia Jacobson** is an MFA candidate in poetry at Syracuse University. She is the co-editor in chief of *Salt Hill Journal*. Her chapbook *On Junkyards* won the Etchings Press Book Prize for Poetry (Etchings Press, 2025). Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in *Shō Poetry Journal*, *Cottonmouth Journal*, *Club Plum*, *The Shore*, and *SUNHOUSE Literary*.

**Annie Bolger** is a poet living in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a winner of the Lois Morrell poetry contest, and her work is published or forthcoming in *Nixes Mate Review*, *tsuri-dōrō*, and *shoegaze literary*, among others. She holds a BA in English Literature and Classics from Swarthmore College.

**Mike Taylor** is a writer/artist living in San Francisco. His work has appeared in *Trash Panda*, *Chrysanthemum*, and *Right Hand Pointing*.

**Wendy Wisner** is the author of three books of poems, most recently *The New Life* (Cornerstone Press/University of Wisconsin Stevens-Point). Her essays and poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Spoon River Review*, *The Washington Post*, *Lilith Magazine*, and elsewhere.

**Rachel Beachy** lives in Kentucky with her husband and children. Her poems have appeared in *Ephemera*, *Freshwater*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Sky Island Journal*, *wildscape. literary journal*, and others. Her debut collection *Tiny Universe* will be published by Kelsay Books.

**Jen Feroze** is a UK poet living by the sea. Her work has appeared in publications including *Poetry Wales*, *Magma*, *Stanchion*, *Okay Donkey*, *Chestnut Review*, *Acumen*, *Black Iris*, *Stone Circle Review*, and *Berlin Lit*. She won the 2024 Poetry Business International Book & Pamphlet Competition with her book *A Dress With Deep Pockets* (Smith|Doorstop 2025).

**John Wojtowicz** grew up working in his family's azalea and rhododendron nursery and still lives in the backwoods of what Ginsberg dubbed "nowhere Zen New Jersey." He teaches social work at Rowan College South Jersey. Recent publications include *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Waxing & Waning*, *Gigantic Sequins*, and *Sonora Review*.

**Marc Alan Di Martino's** books include *Day Lasts Forever: Selected Poems of Mario dell'Arco* (World Poetry, 2024—longlisted for the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation), *Love Poem with Pomegranate* (Ghost City, 2023), *Still Life with City* (Pski's Porch, 2022), and *Unburial* (Kelsay, 2019). He lives in Italy.

**Choiselle Joseph** is a writer from Barbados. Her poetry has appeared in *Gone Lawn* and is forthcoming elsewhere. They are an editor at *The Saartjie Journal*.

**Julie Benesh** is author of *Initial Conditions* and *About Time*. She has been published in *Tin House*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Florida Review*, *Burningword*, and other places, has earned an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and has received an Illinois Arts Council Grant. She has a PhD in human and organizational systems.

**Esther Lay** is a priest, poet, and classical singer living in Oxfordshire. She is a 2025 Forward Prize nominee for her winning poem in the East Riding Festival of Words Poetry Prize and winner of the 2024 Write By The Sea Poetry Prize. In 2025 she placed second in the Write Out Loud Poetry Competition and was shortlisted in the Plaza Prizes, Shelley Memorial Prize, and Ironbridge Prize. She has recent work in *Waxed Lemon*, *Ghost Furniture Catalogue*, *Grain Magazine*, and *Thimble Lit Mag*.

A former bar owner, **SM Stubbs** was born and raised in south Florida. His first book *Learning to Drown* (Gunpowder Press) was released in January 2025. He has been on scholarship and a staff scholar at Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and he has been nominated for the Pushcart, Best of the Net, and Best American.

**Callie S. Blackstone** writes both poetry and prose. She has been nominated for the Pushcart and a Best of the Net. Her debut chapbook *sing eternal* is available through Bottlecap Press.

**Jennifer Randall Hotz's** work is featured or forthcoming in *Orange Blossom Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *Lips Poetry Magazine*, and *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, among other publications. She won 1st place in poetry for the Virginia Writers Club 2023 Golden Nib Awards.

**Jennifer L Freed** is the author of *When Light Shifts*, a finalist for the 2022 Sheila Margaret Motton Book award and the 2025 Medal Provocateur, and short-listed for the 2025 Eric Hoffer award. Recent poetry appears in *Atlanta Review*, *Rust and Moth*, *Sheila-na-Gig*, *Vox Populi*, and *What the House Knows*. She lives in Massachusetts.

**Prosper Ifeanyi** writes from Lagos, Nigeria. A finalist for the 2024 Gold Line Press Poetry Chapbook contest and a finalist for the 2024 Greg Grummer poetry prize, his works are featured or forthcoming in *Transition*, *Magma Poetry*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Offing*, *Poetry Wales*, *Plume*, *Obsidian*, and elsewhere.

**Laurie Koensgen** lives and writes in Ottawa, Canada. Recent publishers include *Literary Review of Canada*, *The Ex-Puritan*, *The Madrigal*, *Blue Moon Review*, *The New Quarterly*, and *Twin Bird Review*. Laurie is a founding member of the Ruby Tuesday Writing Group. Her latest chapbook *this clingstone love* is with Pinhole Poetry.

**Oliver Brooks** (he/they) is a trans poet and an MFA student at Florida State University. His work appears or is forthcoming in *New Delta Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Honey Literary*, *The Texas Review*, *Variant Literature*, and elsewhere. He serves as Poetry Editor for the *Southeast Review*.

**Amy Riddell** has two poetry collections, *Bullets in the Jewelry Box* (FutureCycle Press) and *Narcissistic Injury*, a chapbook (Pudding House). A Pushcart nominee, Amy has poems forthcoming in *The Inflectionist Review* and *The Orchards Poetry Journal*. Her publishing credits include *Prairie Schooner*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*.





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