

Sample

among  
**Animals**

The Lives of Animals and Humans  
in Contemporary Short Fiction

# Among Animals

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Contemporary Short Fiction



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The Lives of Animals and Humans in  
Contemporary Short Fiction  
Edited by John Yunker

Published by Ashland Creek Press  
[www.ashlandcreekpress.com](http://www.ashlandcreekpress.com)

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ISBN 978-1-61822-025-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013944664

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.  
All paper products used to create this book are Sustainable  
Forestry Initiative (SFI) Certified Sourcing.

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# Introduction

As a society, we have a curious relationship with animals. Some animals we welcome into our homes and our lives. We tell them we love them. We call them our children. We become inconsolable when we lose them.

Other animals do not receive such adoration or protection. Some are viewed as nuisances, others as expendable. We keep our distance from these species. We use words like *anthropomorphize* so as not to get emotionally attached. We create mental hierarchies of animal intelligence so we may prioritize one species over another. We create barriers in our minds and on our lawns and in our legal systems to keep animals in their place and us in ours.

The stories in this anthology call attention to the many walls we have constructed.

At Ashland Creek Press, we believe that literature has an important role to play in not only reflecting the world around us but in changing it for the better. This anthology grew out of a desire to publish writing that re-examines and re-imagines our relationship with nature—specifically, with animals.

It's a relationship in need of serious therapy.

The stories you will read here are as diverse as the species they depict, yet they also have much in common. Many of the stories underscore the equalities among humans and animals. "Aren't

You Pretty?” and “Beyond the Strandline” reveal that the grief and loss experienced as a result of injury and death are equal, regardless of species. And in “Litter,” we experience firsthand the world through a stray dog’s eyes.

In “Pelicans,” we witness how an understanding of one species is vital to the survival of another. In “Greyhound,” a rescued animal plays the role of rescuer. And in “The Weight of Things Unsaid,” a baby turtle reminds a mother of two losses, human and animal, and the unbearable weight of each.

Some stories reveal that people who live on the edge of wilderness are often those most in conflict with it. In “Bad Berry Season,” a park ranger does her best to keep bears and people apart, an increasingly futile effort with tragic and surprising consequences. In “Blue Murder,” a farmer who is at odds with the local birds finds himself inexplicably drawn to an individual one.

The apparent contradictions between the animals we love and the animals we kill are not always so apparent to the characters of some stories. In “Emu,” we watch the narrator tenderizing pork for dinner while praying for the sparing of a stray who showed up behind her home. In “Meat,” a child’s eyes shed light on the inconsistency of our society’s yearning for “guilt-free” meat and the compassion we have for our pets.

And in “The Ecstatic Cry,” a penguin researcher in Antarctica resists people, only to find that connections are similar in the animal and human worlds.

Sometimes, these connections emerge via the spiritual and mythological. In “The Boto’s Child” a woman has an encounter with a mythical dolphin, and in “With Sheep,” the lines between human and animal are blurred beyond distinction. In “Alas, Falada!” a zookeeper in mourning for an eland finds solace in a fairy tale.

“Miriam’s Lantern,” the last story in the anthology, deals

with those who are last. In this haunting tale, a man must witness the extinction of a bird species, knowing that he played a role in its demise.

*Day and night I brooded on letting the bird go.  
Together the two of us, of unrelated but closely connected  
species, from separate but closely related cages, would  
rise up into the sky—*

I hope you enjoy these stories as much as we have, and that you'll share them with others.

Ultimately, it is our hope that this collection, while bringing us into so many different and varied worlds, sends a larger message as well — that we are all animals sharing this planet, and it is up to human animals to be better neighbors.

—John Yunker

# Miriam's Lantern

*Ray Keifetz*

*"Under a spreading chestnut tree / the village smithy stands."*

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Chestnut trees really did shade the town where I learned to smith. My father apprenticed me after having read in some journal that the outlook for wagons and carriages had never been brighter. Henry Ford had just introduced the Model T, but that detail was overlooked by the journal. Also overlooked was what happened that afternoon in a nearby field.

That summer afternoon, while my father sat on the porch reading his journal, I went into the field with my two cousins and our three shotguns. We fired at whatever hopped, or fluttered, or cheeped—wrens, meadowlarks, redwing blackbirds. I saw a bird I had never seen before: small, gray-blue, and very round. I saw it in my sights. What a neat bird, I thought and squeezed the trigger. I carried it home by its feet. My father, putting down his journal, said, Good shot, son. I didn't think there were any left.

Thus began my long apprenticeship. I learned to smelt



and temper, cast and hammer, by the colors of fire—the ripe orange orange, the blinding yellow white, the deep ruby so like the eyes of that small dead bird. With every blow my arms grew stronger, the hammer lighter. Not only iron, my master said, we forge ourselves. So do we temper. Shoes by the hundreds, by the thousands, bits and bridles and fittings—shackles I now know—but how beautiful and worthy I thought them then of the beasts they constrained. The shoeing—how fast could you take the flat stock and match it to a hoof? Our world rang with bells of bone and iron. Wooden wagons, carts and carriages drawn by the great horses our hard hands had shod, streamed down the winding roads in an unstoppable flood. I was fast and strong, getting faster and stronger, and one afternoon I shouted, Bring on more work. I'm waiting—

I must have given offense. McAuliff the journeyman put down his hammer and crossed his arms. They were the width of chestnut limbs.

“What kind of fool are you, Marner, that you can't see?”

“I guess I can see as good as the next.”

“Then why can't you see it ain't you that's gotten faster. It's the work that's gotten slower.”

My route to work took me down an aisle of chestnut trees. These great trees shaded us in summer, fed us in the fall; their wood upon which dampness had scant effect timbered our barns and fenced our fields year round. My eagerness to reach the forge, the flames, turned my way into a green, leafy blur. But a few days after offending the journeyman, I saw something that made me stop and stare. Maybe it was the falling leaves swirling sluggishly in the muggy air. Maybe it was the season—high summer and green everywhere—and that these leaves falling in clouds were dry and brown. I looked up. The entire crown was ablaze but without a single nut pod, which ripen and fall before the leaves. As I resumed my walk, the far side of the trunk came into view. The rough

bark was bloated with lumps and giant boils, split open with long vertical fissures dripping orange dust. I rushed from tree to tree, circled each trunk, looked up, looked down ... some of them still appeared as if they might stand forever, but everywhere else the cracks, the boils, the orange dust ...

When I reached the forge I said to McAuliff, "There's something happening to the trees!"

He said, "That is the least of your worries."

I stared at him and made another discovery. The journeyman's hair was gray. McAuliff had become an old man. Then I looked at the forge. Where were the flames? I threw on more wood, worked the bellows. The yellow flames leaped. Then I heard the master calling my name and McAuliff saying better not keep him waiting.

The master was sitting behind his table—a log he'd split to test the edge of an axe and planed smooth. He was counting out some bills and coins. Without looking up he said, "Marner, I'm letting you go."

"After all these years—without a hint—without a warning—"

"Hint? Warning? Haven't you eyes?"

"It don't seem right."

"It ain't right," he said, pushing the money toward me.

"All these years—" was what I said.

"You're still young," was what he answered.



It was the earliest autumn anyone could remember and for countless chestnut trees the last. They just flared up in a burst of brilliant color and died. The same also for many a forge and foundry. My first stop a group of men were sitting in front of a cold hearth, their arms enormous from when they still fed it.

"I'm looking for work."

"You find any, you let us know."

Before my eyes their great bare forearms began to swell and crack ... I looked again and they were as before, dangling uselessly by their sides.

The road out of town was not the one I had come in on. Automobiles racing round the turns pushed me and the few remaining horse carts, drivers, and horses choking into the brush. Almost a journeyman, I went from town to town climbing hills, dipping into hollows, searching for work. But everywhere the fires were dying. When I started my apprenticeship, it was as though the stars in the sky for want of room had come down onto the hilltops and into the hollows between, so many stars twinkling up there and down here, and now it seemed as if half the sky had been snuffed out. I walked through groves of dead chestnut trees, their limbs lying shattered in the dust. Here and there I'd come to a sapling shooting up, pencil-thin in a race against the blistering rust. One solitary fruit was now all they could bear, just enough to forward the agony.

Once in a long while I'd find a forge or foundry not yet snuffed and inquire after work. Experience? they'd ask, and I would tell them proudly that I was almost a journeyman. The first man said, and he more or less spoke for the few that followed, "I was kind of looking for someone without his way of doing so there'd be room to take in my way of doing."

"I can learn," I said.

"Not on my time."

Early winter followed early fall, and spring was belated. I found work sharpening lawn mower blades and straightening bicycle frames. Puttering and sputtering at this and that I would hear, as if he were standing right behind me, my master's voice, and I would repeat out loud his scornful words—*you call yourself a smith*—and pack up and move on.

Then I heard a rumor of a town deep in the woods that the blight had not yet reached, a town still needing a smith. The town—Praywell, strange name—seemed in truth the answer to my prayers. Chestnut trees ripe with fruit, their trunks strong and sound, shaded a narrow street lined with the workshops of potters, spinners, weavers, glass blowers, turners and joiners. At the very end, just before the street turned back into the woods, stood an abandoned blacksmith shop, its forge gone out and cold. I told them I had no money, given even the shape the place was in, to buy it. They said you don't have to buy it, just light it and keep it lit, keep the forge burning. Here is all the flat stock you will need for shoes, iron enough to shoe a herd, rasps enough to bevel the world ... But where, I asked, are my customers, my farmers and carriage makers—

“Gone,” they said. “Surely you have seen ...”

I said no more. For there were anvils and hammers, and my arms were strong. There was a loft, warm and tight, and my body ached from the nights on the ground. Thus resumed my long apprenticeship. Hour after hour I hammered out shoes no horse would ever wear and at the end of the day thrust them back into the flames, day after day starting anew what I had destroyed the night before. Separated by a sagging rope, I'd explain to the infrequent visitors down from the city the colors of fire—the ripe orange orange, the blinding yellow white, the deep ruby so like the eyes of a small dead bird—explaining to the indifference beyond the rope what my life had been reduced to.

The last visitor had left hours ago and the shadows pressed against me when I heard a woman's voice:

“So how does it feel to be a piece of living history?”

I turned and saw a woman standing at the rope, her face glowing in the forge light. Her hair streaked with gray, she looked careworn but at the same time almost young, youthful.

"If you call it living," I answered.

"I do," she said and wished me good night.

Every morning as I worked the bellows, I'd watch for her walking past my open doors on the way to the meadow outside of town, and I would watch for her return hours later, wicker baskets overflowing with roots and flowers. And all afternoon as I tended my own fire I'd think of her, of Miriam tending her fires, her kettles boiling, her dyes spreading. In the evening when the last horseshoes had been melted flat, cooled and stacked, I would walk up and down Praywell's only street, my booted feet thumping the wooden planks, crickets singing in the trees. Back and forth from one end of town to the other I paced, passing the closed doors of joiners and weavers and spinners, passing the dyer's door, Miriam's. One evening as I approached her door for maybe the fourth time I saw that her light was still burning, a warm, inviting light that spilled through the cracks and formed a glowing pool at my feet. I knocked softly. Miriam opened and let me in.

"I'm working late," she said.

"But what is the point?" I said. "What we make goes nowhere."

"Nowhere?"

"I forge a hundred horseshoes only to melt them down again."

"And Matthew planes a hundred cherrywood boards. And planes them again. Lucy spins her thread from the skein she unraveled yesterday—"

"What futility!"

"Tell that to the nest-building birds, to the spiders, the beavers, the ants ... tell that to the weavers and spinners and builders of the earth—"

"But those are animals."

"Yes," Miriam said. "They are."

Miriam continued stirring her dye. I peered into the kettle

and saw our faces coming close together and the lantern above rippling back from the dark indigo.

"Sometimes," I said, "it feels like a punishment."

She kept stirring, and I kept peering.

"A man apprentices himself for seven years, a man with arms like these, and he can't find a job. How can the world be so wide and have no room for a pair of skillful hands?"

"There is room," she said. "Maybe not very much. Tucked away off to the side and in the far corners, you can still find some."

From then on I tried to work as if I had no mind, no aspirations, neither past nor future, as if the hammer, iron, and my arms were one, as if they had as much choice to rise and fall as my heart to beat. What is mastery anyway, Miriam had said, but a kind of forgetting? Day followed identical day, my speed increasing, my arms broadening. Whenever doubt darkened me, I would glance in on Miriam. Her faith, her acceptance, was a lantern whose light illuminated the vague outlines of a path, which her smile invited me to follow.

As I was working the bellows one day, explaining the flames to a young couple behind the rope, I heard the young man whisper to the girl: "It's like going to the zoo."

After they left I barred the doors and extinguished the forge. On the way out of town I stopped by Miriam's door to say good-bye.

"I can't stay here any longer."

"But why?"

"Look at my arms—" I held them out to her. "Look how they've withered."

The world was wide, after all. Why was I hiding like some criminal in a far corner? I went up to the city to try my luck. You can always find work in a city, particularly if you swallow your pride.

Two blocks from the city zoo I found a room. I soon

learned that it was in this very zoo, in the woods surrounding the caged animals, that the first blighted chestnut was discovered. At the earliest opportunity I paid a visit to see for myself the source of the contagion. That tree, however, had long since been felled: only its stump, wide enough to dance upon, remained ringed by sickly shoots. Though I had no further interest here, I nevertheless continued onward, compelled, it almost felt, by someone or something calling to me in distress. Up ahead a group of boys were jeering at a curious, shaggy beast pacing back and forth in its cage. At my approach they moved on. The harmless seeming creature—singular, sterile, the sign said, its ferocious parents having been of different but closely related species—gave a soft growl and continued its interminable pacing. I wandered off the main road with its cages and pools and came to a brick building. There were no cages here. Instead a flock of fluttering leaflets pinned to a board offered employment opportunities. And as I had already passed the elephant house and seen the men going about with their shovels, I went in without reading further.

The man behind the desk looked as tired and faded as his brown suit. His name, Mr. Kearney—Irish, I supposed. He asked me if I liked animals. I told him how, before commencing my apprenticeship, I had worked on a farm. He said I asked you if you liked animals. I miss the wagons, I said, the carriages. I miss them because of the horses and not just because I made my living from them, but for the sound of their hooves, the sparks flying ...

“What about birds?”

“I sure miss those horses.”

“I’m asking you about birds.”

“There used to be some. In the trees. There used to be some trees.” Shaking his head, Mr. Kearney stood up, and I did the same. After all, there were plenty of other jobs in the city ...

“You may work out,” he said. “Because if you cared a jot,

you wouldn't last an hour."

A chilling drizzle, typical of this city, had begun to fall. I followed Mr. Kearney past a line of shivering people.

"Some days there's nobody here," Mr. Kearney said. "Then some newspaperman happens to remember, writes a story ..."

I glanced at the faces of the men and women—what were they hoping to find up ahead?—while Mr. Kearney went on about the fickleness of human beings, how they never seemed to care about anything until the situation was past caring, as for instance the passing of beings other than themselves, by which I understood him to mean animals but of whom he spoke with reverence, as if their presence or absence among us were on a par with heaven and our future therein. From these remarks, and from the hundreds of people waiting patiently in the miserable weather, I concluded that something huge and splendid must be dying.

At a nod from Mr. Kearney, a uniformed guard announced that the building was closed and that all were welcome to return tomorrow. We had it to ourselves, the dark, deserted interior in which a lone cylindrical mesh cage illuminated by a single spotlight's downward beam occupied the center.

"Take a good look, Marner. In my lifetime their migrations darkened the sky. Take a good look. For now and forever, you're looking at the last of them."

Even before he spoke I had already recognized the small bluish bird against whose eyes I gauged my fires—

"There were millions of them once," he said. "As recent as fifteen years ago, so-called sportsmen were still organizing shoots. As recent as ten years ago, boys with guns were popping them out of trees. I ask you, Marner, can such people be forgiven?"

The bird swiveled its head and fixed me with its blood-red eye.



“No,” I whispered. “And they should not be.”

We stayed in that dark room for hours, staring and breathing. I felt Mr. Kearney beside me, his outrage, his pity. I felt, as with myself, that he could not remove his eyes from the small bird perched alone on a dowel. I kept waiting for Mr. Kearney to raise his voice, to shout down the shotgun blasts reverberating through the aviary, but he must have been waiting for me to do the same.

“What do you want of me?”

“It's very simple,” he answered. “I want you to watch.”



I was issued a uniform and instructed to keep back the crowds, though a slack rope suspended between opposite walls would have sufficed. Most of the time there were no crowds, only a hungry, waiting silence, which I tried to keep back as well. Day after day I watched the bird whose solitude could not be measured. The passing of an entire race, Mr. Kearney said, must not go unnoticed. Can't you see the multitudes, the whirling dark clouds, the endless blue light, the generations fluttering and breathing because this lone individual continues to breathe and flutter? I saw only a small solitary bird, a small solitary ending that took red berries from my hand. Its bluish head swiveling iridescently from side to side—what did it see? Day and night I brooded on letting the bird go. Together the two of us, of unrelated but closely connected species, from separate but closely related cages would rise up into the sky—

Not a day passed without Mr. Kearney looking in.

“When nothing else is left,” he said, “there's the waiting.”

The bird sidled down its dowel toward Mr. Kearney.

“It knows you,” I said.

"These birds mate for life. They're not meant to be alone."

"Maybe another will turn up."

"The last one turned up about nine years ago on a kitchen pile—a few bones, a few feathers, a lot of buckshot."

"Maybe in some far-off spot—"

"Where?"

"Some tucked-away spot," I said, "where boys don't carry guns." And I started to cough.

The cough got worse; my breath rattled through the darkness, but the nature of my work forbade me to miss a single day. Even on my days off you would find me leaning over the guardrail, eyes fixed on the tiny bird perched behind the mesh. I asked Mr. Kearney how old did he guess the bird to be; what age did he expect the bird to reach? It was hard to say, Mr. Kearney said. It seemed a healthy specimen.

And yet I sensed that beneath its soft plush plumage, as with me beneath my sweat-stiff uniform, the plump little bird was slowly withering. Slowly, irrevocably, but with a hearty appetite. Day after day I fed it the red berries that it loved and watched. I watched and waited, my ragged breath filling the dark room. And the tiny bird gazed back at me and at whomever else was there or not there, at all of us, the present and absent with equal equanimity as if presence or absence beyond the mesh could not have the slightest impact on the greater absence within.

Every morning, covered in sweat from a night of not sleeping, I would rush from my room to the wire mesh whose sign in the language of verdicts declared No others are known—lest that verdict be commuted in my absence to None ... I lost all sense of days, months, years, the difference between, between a day and a year, a moment and a lifetime; there were only days now, only one day really—

And then I woke to a strange stillness. The shotguns had ceased their blasting. I seemed to see my face as if reflected

in a deep well, and beside my face, almost touching, the dyer Miriam's—and from these signs I understood that *the day* had come.

Wheezing, scarcely able to breathe, I rushed to the cage. But there the bluish bird sat as usual upon its dowel thin perch, unchanged, unchanging, swiveling its head in my direction as I pitched forward toward its feet.

It was Mr. Kearney who found me at the foot of the cage, my fingers wrapped around a handful of red berries, and shook me awake. For a moment the two of us crouched there together on the cold cement floor, the light from above, a light so familiar, so soothing, cascading down on us, bathing us in radiance. I lifted my eyes and for an instant beheld in this glimmering true light not only the one last bird but all the birds, the multitudes in swirling flight, the nest builders, weavers ... other creatures as well, the diggers, burrowers, the builders of this earth who do their work without cease or complaint.

Mr. Kearney helped me to my feet, but it was not only Mr. Kearney. The cage was brilliantly illuminated, and the little bird clearly perched within, yet flapping his short stubby wings, he seemed to be helping me up, too, as if somehow he had managed to enter my cage or I had fallen into his.

"I was wrong about you, Marner," Mr. Kearney said. "You do care."

I was hoping I would die first. "I was trying ..."

Soon after, Mr. Kearney let me go. It was a kindness.

I packed a rucksack with food—bags full of red berries and for myself dry bread, hard cheese—and set out for the hills and hollows, the woods and open fields of my childhood. The countryside had become even darker, as if somewhere the dikes and sandbags had all collapsed, and I made my way as through a dark flood. Yet my heart was buoyant, for perhaps this darkness had to be if I were to pick out the faint

Miriam's Lantern

glimmering, the unassuming radiance of Miriam's lantern and by its light take up again, for now and forever, my unfinished apprenticeship.



## Contributors

**Mary Akers** is the author of two short story collections, *Bones of an Inland Sea* (Press 53, 2013) and *Women Up On Blocks* (Press 53, 2009), and the nonfiction book *One Life to Give* (The Experiment, 2010). She is editor-in-chief of the online journal *r.k.v.r.y.* and has been a VCCA Fellow and a Bread Loaf waiter. She co-founded the Institute for Tropical Marine Ecology, a study abroad marine ecology program originally located in Roseau, Dominica. Akers frequently writes fiction that focuses on the intersections between art and science, including such topics as diverse and timely as the environmental movement and the struggle for human and animal rights. Although raised in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, which she will always call home, she currently lives in western New York.

**Philip Armstrong** is the co-director of the New Zealand Center for Human-Animal Studies at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch ([www.nzchas.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.nzchas.canterbury.ac.nz)). His most recent scholarly book is *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Routledge, 2008). He has published short fiction and poetry in various journals and anthologies in New Zealand and Australia.

**Sara Dupree** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Dakota, where she has received the John Little Award for fiction and the Thomas McGrath Award for poetry. She lives in Grand Forks with her husband, two daughters, two dogs, two cats, and two horses. Her work has appeared in *Conclave* and *Alligator Juniper*.

**Melodie Edwards** graduated with an MFA from the University of Michigan on a Colby Fellowship, where she received two Hopwood Awards in fiction and nonfiction. *Glimmer Train* published “Si-Si-Gwa-D” in 2002, one of the winners of their New Writers fiction contest. She has published stories in *South Dakota Quarterly*, *North Dakota Review*, *Michigan Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, and others. A nature essay, “A Lament for My Jacobson’s Organ,” received first prize in *Crazyhorse*’s nonfiction contest. In 2005, she received the Doubleday Wyoming Arts Council Award for Women. “The Bird Lady” aired on NPR’s Selected Shorts and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She lives in Laramie, Wyoming, with her husband and twin daughters and co-owns Night Heron Books and Coffeehouse.

**Carol Guess** is the author of eleven books of poetry and prose, including *Switch*, *Tinderbox Lawn*, and *Doll Studies: Forensics*. Forthcoming books include *How To Feel Confident With Your Special Talents* (co-written with Daniela Olszewska) and *X Marks The Dress: A Registry* (co-written with Kristina Marie Darling). She is professor of English at Western Washington University, where she teaches creative writing and queer studies.

**Patrick Hicks** is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Finding the Gossamer* and *This London*. He is also the editor of *A Harvest of Words*, which was funded by the National

Endowment for the Humanities. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Glimmer Train*, *The Missouri Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *New Ohio Review*, *Salon*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Natural Bridge*, and many others. He has been nominated seven times for the Pushcart Prize, he was recently a finalist for the High Plains Book Award, the Dzanc Short Story Collection Competition, and the Gival Press Novel Award. He has won the *Glimmer Train* Fiction Award and received grants from the Bush Foundation and the South Dakota Arts Council. In 2014, his poetry collection *Adoptable* will be published by Salmon Poetry, and his first novel, *The Commandant of Lubizec*, will be published by Steerforth/Random House. In 2015, his short story collection, *The Collector of Names*, will be published by Schaffner Press. He is the writer-in-residence at Augustana College as well as a faculty member at the low-residency MFA program at Sierra Nevada College.

**Julian Hoffman** lives beside the Prespa Lakes in northern Greece, monitoring birds in upland areas where wind farms have been built or proposed. His book, *The Small Heart of Things: Being at Home in a Beckoning World*, was chosen by Terry Tempest Williams as the winner of the 2012 AWP Award Series for creative nonfiction and was published in 2013. Along with winning the 2011 Terrain.org Nonfiction Prize, his work has appeared in *Kyoto Journal*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *EarthLines*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and *Flyway*, among others. You can catch up with Julian at [www.julian-hoffman.com](http://www.julian-hoffman.com).

**Suzanne Kamata** is the author of the novels *Gadget Girl: The Art of Being Invisible* (GemmaMedia, 2013) and *Losing Kei* (Leapfrog Press, 2008), as well as a short story collection, *The Beautiful One Has Come* (Wyatt-Mackenzie Publishing, 2011). She is also the editor of three anthologies. Her essays



and short stories have appeared in more than 100 publications, including *Real Simple*; *Brain, Child*; *The Utne Reader*; *Crab Orchard Review*; and *Calyx*. She currently serves as fiction editor of *Kyoto Journal* and fiction co-editor of *Literary Mama*.

**Ray Keifetz** wrote his first short story at the age of fifteen in a high school English class. He was asked to write a paragraph on what scared him. He handed in a blank sheet of paper, went home, and stayed up all night writing twelve pages about a snow leopard and what scared it. The teacher praised the story but failed him on the assignment. And that pretty much sums up his writing career ever since. Along the way, his poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Bitter Oleander*, *Other Voices*, *Kestrel*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Burntdistrict*, and he has received a Pushcart Prize nomination. To support his writing—and himself—he has pursued various and sundry occupations, at the moment building furniture and peddling wine. “Miriam’s Lantern” was first published by *Clackamas Literary Review* and is part of a recently completed collection of stories entitled *The Hidden Cost of Gifts*.

**Diane Lefer** has been an animal behavior observer for the research department of the Los Angeles Zoo since 1997. “Alas, Falada!” first appeared in *Faultline* and was included in her collection, *California Transit*, which received the Mary McCarthy Prize and was published by Sarabande Books. She is grateful to the world of independent publishing and salutes small presses, including Ashland Creek, along with those that embraced three of her novels that went homeless for way too long: *Nobody Wakes Up Pretty* (Rainstorm Press, 2012), *The Fiery Alphabet* (Loose Leaves Publishing, 2013), and *The Still Point* (Aqueous Books, scheduled for fall 2014). She volunteers at the Amanda Foundation, offering affection

and playtime to the rescue cats and hopes that these sweet creatures, too, soon find homes.

Educated at Harvard and Johns Hopkins, **Rosalie Loewen** lived and worked in a number of countries before settling in rural Alaska with her husband and their two small daughters. She spends her free time outdoors seeking inspiration from the natural world while keeping a sharp lookout for the neighborhood bears.

**Kelly Magee's** first collection of stories, *Body Language* (University of North Texas Press) won the Katherine Ann Porter Prize for Short Fiction. Her writing has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Tampa Review*, *Diagram*, *Ninth Letter*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Colorado Review*, and others. She is an assistant professor of creative writing at Western Washington University.

**Charlotte Stephanie Malerich** works and writes near the District of Columbia. "Meat" first appeared in *The Again* No. 11 in 2013. Other short stories have appeared online in *Aphelion*, as well as *Sorcerous Signals* and its print counterpart *Mystic Signals*. Her current projects include an urban fantasy novel and a graphic novel version of her short story "The 12th Fairy." She lives with one human and two rescued rabbits. Go vegan, stay vegan.

**Midge Raymond's** short-story collection, *Forgetting English*, received the Spokane Prize for Short Fiction and "lights up the poetry-circuits of the brain" (*Seattle Times*). Originally published by Eastern Washington University Press in 2009, the book was reissued in an expanded edition by Press 53 in 2011. Her work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* magazine, *TriQuarterly*, *American Literary Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Witness*, and other publications.

**Jean Ryan**, a native Vermonter, lives in Napa, California. A horticultural enthusiast and chef of many years, Jean's writing has always been her favorite pursuit. Her stories and essays have appeared in a variety of journals, including *Other Voices*, *Pleiades*, *The Summerset Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Blue Lake Review*, *Damselfly*, and *Earthspeak*. Nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize, she has also published a novel, *Lost Sister*. Her debut collection of short stories, *Survival Skills*, was published in April 2013 by Ashland Creek Press. Please visit her website at <http://jean-ryan.com>.

The daughter of a veterinarian, **Jessica Zbeida** grew up in the company of animals. During her education, Jessica worked with a variety of writers, including Zulfikar Ghose, Frederick and Steven Barthelme, Mary Robison, John Tait, and Barbara Rodman. She spends her time teaching, writing, reading, and bicycling. She lives in North Texas with her husband and four cats.



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