



Neon

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neonmagazine (at) ymail (dot) com

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Truth

It is truth and I swallow it down.
It is truth and it has a bitter taste. No,
it is not at all like candy.
Waiter, this truth is awful. Please take it back.
Madam would like lies then, I presume?
You presume correctly, waiter.
I like the taste of lies, I confess to him,
conspiratorially. Call me uncouth,
but I like it. It is sweet like candy.
Everyone likes candy, I tell the waiter.
It is true, he concedes, somewhat sadly.
Everyone likes candy.

Ants

There is something important about me,
I think.
I have no real evidence
though I *do* have red hair.
As a child I could
lie on the ground for hours

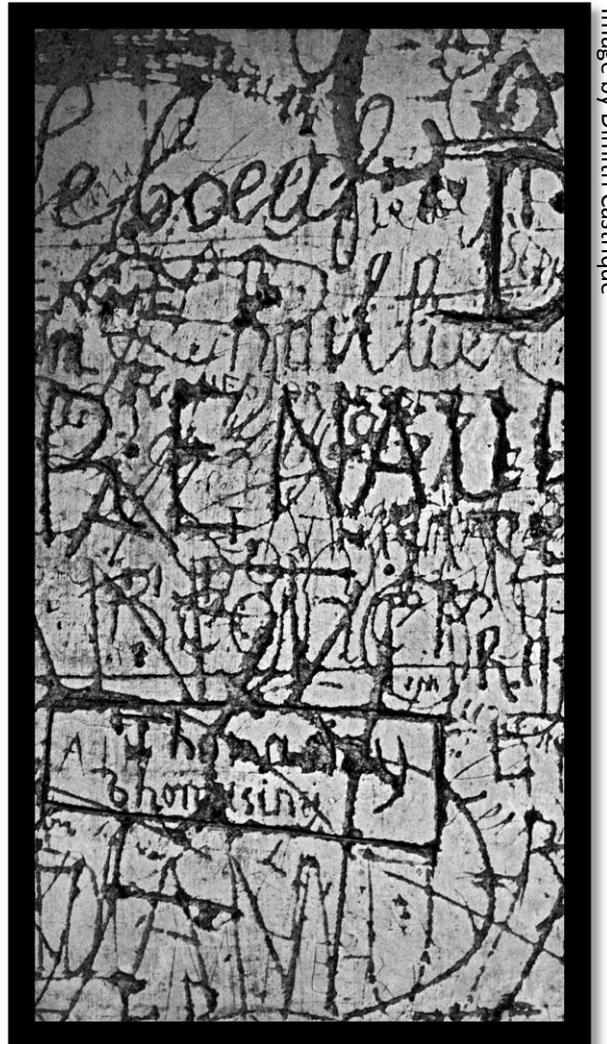


Image by Dimitri Castrique

and watch ants crawl up
out of a hole. "A scientist!"
my father said, though nothing
came of it.
Passions desert me like birds
though I stay the same--
an unknown woman in the streets
an unknown woman on the train.
Like all unknown persons
failure doesn't touch me--
shame cannot live long
without a witness.
And who is to say
I couldn't start liking ants again,
that I couldn't come up the front walk
one day, waving. "Hello," I could say.
"It's me."

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Two Poems

Claudine R. Moreau



Image by Gary Scott

The Marriage Without Us

In a week, the dust thickens on our kitsch:
knick-knacks from our grandmothers' mothers,
the china cats and porcelain angels,
the lamp filled with broken seashells,
photographs of the honeymoon on the mantle.
In two weeks, the grass grows six inches.
Thistle, clover, and dandelions
creep inside the fence-line.

In three months, the utilities are shut off.
The icebox melts.
Water leaks and pools around the kitchen island.
The 80/20 ground chuck mutates.

Neon

The refrigerator's spoil bursts open.

A plight of maggots emerges, and mingles

with colonies of fruit flies

hatching from black bananas.

Dog finally eats cat.

More time passes.

Storms slash the shingles.

Rain soaks 2200 square feet of carpet.

Black mould flowers

from floor to ceiling,

expands like concentric supernovae.

What stays whole--plastic and stainless steel:

our daughter's toy dinosaurs, spatulas,

the flip top garbage can, a lemon zester,

the front panel of the dishwasher.

It's been a year.

The neighbours come to look for us

and break down the back door.

They search under the computer desk,

between the rafters,

in the dark creosote crawlspaces,

but find our bodies in bed,

with just inches between us

that felt like light-years.

Tomb

He's left her last message

Dishwasher is Clean

stuck to the fridge with magnets,

wreathed with preschool artwork--

shamrocks and rainbows,

a handprint turkey, a cotton ball snowman.

The white plates still rest

in the Whirlpool

upright

like a terracotta army

buried deep in the racks.

The steak knives are turned

with blades down,

glass tumblers cocked

in mismatched angles recline on top,

below shallow bowls

nest themselves

into their gentle curves.

Suppose he keeps this message

as an epithet

for the last meal they scraped
silently off the plates.

Or suppose he's forgotten
how cold a shared bed can get
when sex is a monthly chore
to avoid foreclosure,
and the loop-de-loop of letters
is an arrhythmia, the last warm pulse.

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Siberia

L.E. Butler



Image by "Miles"

Eleven days after my husband died, he telephoned me at dawn.

"I can barely hear you," I said, sitting up in bed.

"Somewhere in Siberia," he whispered.

His notebook was still on his side of the bed. I wrote in the half-light. The directions were incredibly complicated. I had to ask him to repeat himself several times, so soft was his voice.

"Speak up."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Feeling a little weak. So after the fifth logging road, go ten more miles, there's a lake with red stones on its bank."

He hadn't a passport, of course. He hadn't any clothes.

Daylight advanced. My notes were mostly legible. I rode the train to the city and wandered the alleys behind the shopping centre, drinking Red Bulls. An African boy wearing diamond earrings sold me a passport and a carton of cigarettes.

In Siberia everything smelled of sunflower seeds and incense. No one looked at me. I paid a smoky man to drive me into the forest as far as the roads allowed, which wasn't far at all. He seemed to drive with his eyes closed. When the mud grew too deep, the tangerine-bright car stopped at a power station and I continued on foot. So dense were the trees that I couldn't tell when daylight ended or began. Which was just as well, as I didn't wish to consider the passage of time.

After several days or weeks, the forest cleared, the road rounded a lake, and I came upon an inn.

"I've got no clothes," my husband reminded me. He reclined in a mess of white sheets under the lobby's chandelier. His hair had changed from chestnut-silver into a fine blond floss. His chest rattled with each breath.

He winced when I hugged him but smiled patiently.

"Get up," I said. "I've got your passport." It was at the bottom of my rucksack, under the peanut butter sandwiches and vitamin tonics. "Get up."

I tried very hard to be patient with him as we walked through the woods. He was cold in his sheet, which he'd wrapped around his person like a primitive toga. Though he looked healthy and strong he took forever, pausing fearfully at even the smallest streams.

"Should I carry you?" I said once, watching him pick his way down a hill. I regretted my tone as soon as I saw his face, his bewildered smile.

I did carry him on my back, for as long as I could manage.

We found the tangerine car idling at the power station. The driver rubbed his face and took us back to the city. The airport was a glass labyrinth. No one understood my attempts to speak Russian, or perhaps they were just ignoring me. Our plane was due to take off in seven minutes.

"Why are there no gates listed?" I stormed.

"Quite like to rest for a moment," said my husband.

"There's a sign that says International. Way down at the other end of the terminal. Come on."

"Maybe a cup of tea."

I handed him his passport. "Keep me in your sight. Keep moving."

I saw our gate, with its arch of guttering green neon. An eyeless boy in a black rubber uniform stood sentry. I waved at him and began to run. I had only to reach the gate in time; then I would wedge my hips in the door frame and force them all to wait until my husband came shuffling along.

It couldn't have been possible that all the people were eyeless. I pushed them out of my way as I ran--whey-faced old ladies, children, youths. They tumbled helplessly, heads knocking against the concrete floor. You might think I wouldn't care, would scarcely notice, but their whispered protests made me wretched with shame.

The eyeless boy was gone. The neon archway hissed and went dark. The metal door was shut but I pulled at the handle with all my strength, wrenching it open.

I turned and looked for my husband. I couldn't see him but I knew my voice would carry under the dirty glass. "It's time. It's time. It's time."

When I turned back to the door I found it opened to a whistling darkness. I peered down till my eyes tingled. It couldn't be looked at. I'd go blind.

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Three Poems

Omar Metwally

Forbidden Fruit

He picks poppy flowers from her hair
as they show each other scars and keeps
them between the pages of a book, beside
dried-out butterflies. The weight of understanding
presses bitter juice from seed pods. Someday,
they'll prick them with needles, fill syringes, and still
each other's pain.



Image by Jascha Hoste

Mr. Lemming

I bite my tongue as the psychiatrist interviews Mr. Lemming in the psychiatric ED status post suicide attempt number one: the sole survivor of his cult's alleged mass suicide. He notes Mr. Lemming's family history, asks about recurring feelings of sadness or emptiness, psychiatric medication. Whom he lives with. What he does for a living. How much he drinks. What he smokes. With whom. And how he spends weekends. Mr. Lemming blames his instincts: he sensed a storm and led his people to new lands. They lost their leader along the way.

Resignation Speech

I hurt like testicular torsion
as I buy smokes from the
carcinogenized tobacco store
owner: life self-strangulated
and died within my scrotum.

A dull ache nauseates me as he
speaks with his wife during lunch
breaks. She yells at a brittle man
nearly deaf. From a distance, I watch
his lips move. He's rehearsing
a resignation, or impeachment, speech
as he steps out of public office.

From a distance, I notice his wife
is nearly deaf, too.

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Two Poems

Howie Good

Song In A Minor Key

Love bends

like light

around

found objects,

a destitute

white Ford,

say, with one

red door

and Florida

plates,

while

the shadows

invite

themselves,

a museum

of dark



Image by "coolkid480"

carvings,

police

marksmen

in the windows.

Diorama

1

The horse collapsing on the bridge,

the fire in the background,

the use of the moon,

its flesh and fur stripped away

with elk-bone scrappers

and its hide made pliable

with the buffalo's mashed brains.

2

The wolf sits back

on its haunches and watches.

The eye is the hammer.

To polish a diamond,

there is nothing like its own dust.

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Two Poems

Jonathan Greenhouse

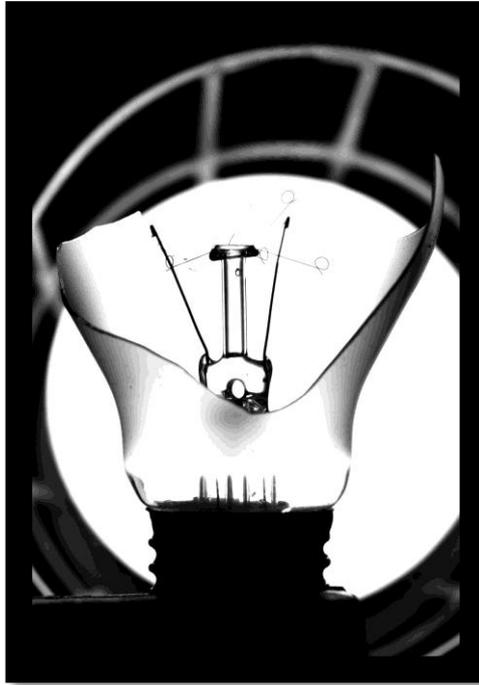


Image by Bernd Liebers

Release

"Release" first appeared in Roanoke Review

And you're left with a box of candies

without the candies

And a music box

that makes no music.

All your relatives have left

and your child refuses to acknowledge your paternity.

In your garden, all the tomatoes

Neon

have become squash;

All the heads of lettuce

have turned into a wounded doe.

By the window, there's a door

and by the door, a window

And by the kitchen sink there's a pool of water

in which you see yourself drowning.

No one tells you the time of day

because it's night

And the nightingale's singing

from inside the bars of a cage.

No one will let you go

until you've paid for all your mistakes:

No one will ever let you go.

Fallen In Sectional Constructions

"Fallen in Sectional Constructions" first appeared in Slipstream

The whole building is composed of insects,
walls of untiring ants, floors of worms,
all of them travelling endlessly in circles,
and a roof soaring with butterfly wings.
Food's served upon plates composed of bees,
milk drunk from glasses of wasps;
We grab spaghettis with scarab forks
and cut rounds of sirloin steaks
with stinging centipedal knives.

Those living here have snakes for hair,
lizards for tongues and dragon-like legs,
and their arms are ancient chelonians.

When it rains, utter chaos reigns,
an amphibious mishmash contended over
by climbing spiders and chameleons.

Everything starves until all of them eat
or are eaten by one other
so that the house is converted into a cemetery,
an immense café of fought-over fluids,
a factory of the recently-deceased.

Some hope to rebuild this place,
but not of the ignoble insect inhabitants,
nor of these strange reptilian tenants;
It would be comprised entirely of aquatic life:
Fish edifying slippery and odorous pyramids,
whales forming gargantuan-eyed temples,
jellyfish colonizing gelatinous gardens,
and beavers constructing an enormous ocean
with their fallen timber coastlines. . .

All these musings remain forgotten fantasies:

This world has exhausted its potable water
and the sea's acidity has killed off the fish.

The residence will not be re-erected.

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The Year Our Children Left

Tetman Callis

This was the way our children left, in the year they left us behind. They got all--how shall we put it--self-righteous and accusatory, the way children can get when they come to understand that nearly everything they've been told is some form of a lie. They said to us, how dare you? How dare you bring us into this world? We can't believe you did this to us, and no reason you can invent--that your gods wanted it, that you like playing with babies, that you're so addicted to fucking that you couldn't help yourselves--no reason is good enough, is justification for the crime of bringing us to life in this godforsaken world of slavery and death. We're not staying. We want no part of this.

These were the same things we had said when we were their age, but we had stayed. We took part. So we paid our children no mind.

They met among themselves late at night. Can you believe they did this to us? they said to one another, stoking the fires of their outrage. We are not staying! they shouted, swearing a blood oath.

We were sleeping while they met. The days were long and the work was hard. We were growing older, weary, needing our rest.

Our children discussed the best ways to leave. Some preferred gunshots to the head. Short and sweet, they said, and there's no shortage of guns. Plenty of bullets, too. Others said this would be too messy, thought asphyxiation the better way out. We can do it with cars, they said, with the exhaust fumes. And we all have cars, big ones, that give off plenty of fumes and have spacious interiors, we can fit all our friends in, we can all leave together. Still others suggested poisons--plenty of poisons! they said--or jumping off high buildings or in front of trains or other moving vehicles--

they're everywhere! they said, and convenient!--or hanging by their necks, or slitting open their veins, or starvation--dehydration would be faster, some said--or any of the myriad ways their parents--we--had devised for leaving. Our parents are experts at leaving, some said, we should let them decide. Others disagreed. Our parents are hopeless screw-ups, they said, we don't dare entrust them with something this important.

And so they didn't. And so they left, at night while we slept, they left in droves, leaving their bodies behind, shattered, torn, crushed, undone, in our homes, in our cars, on the streets of the cities we had built, for us to find in the morning when we woke up, for us to sit beside in the cold early sunlight, in the year our children left.

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Image by George Bosela

Three Poems

Noel Sloboda

Another Horror Movie

In the dark, close by, someone murmurs "Oh no." On the big screen, it always seems clear when death looms. When the hero's best friend steps into the woods, the camera draws close to her dilated pupils and speakers flood the theatre with a cacophony that evokes the fractured psyche of a killer. Everyone knows her number is up. You also know she is a ghost already: this simulacra of the girl whose homework you were too happy to do--just to see her smile in response to something connected to you. And now, surrounded by people you don't know, people who never met her, you feel sad--not so much because she never saw how you felt but because you can't recall if she had eyes as blue as those of the beauty whose innocence will be taken any moment now.

Half-beast

Undone before the end, my brother
confessed he had tasted the breath

of the lamia: wet and sweet,

like rosé just uncorked, powerful
enough to make the temples

throb. He admitted he had

gazed for hours into pools

of bottomless night, never

rippling, despite all the stories

of men drowning there.

I asked why he couldn't

just find a neighbourhood girl,

reminded him he'd been hurt

by such exotic creatures before.

He protested she was misunderstood:

his lover did not devour every man--

besides, you could have one hell of a time

if you brought her fresh-cut flowers;

it wasn't like in those tall tales,

he smirked: her bottom half was just fine.

I haven't seen him for almost a year now--

last heard, she'd lured him back east

to live among other monsters.



Image by Dora Pete

Samhain

You can hang despair
on the gun hooks--

drilled into our walls
by the former owners--

after the sun drops,
like Newton's apple

filled with sin
and razor blades.

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Three Poems

Rachel Mehl

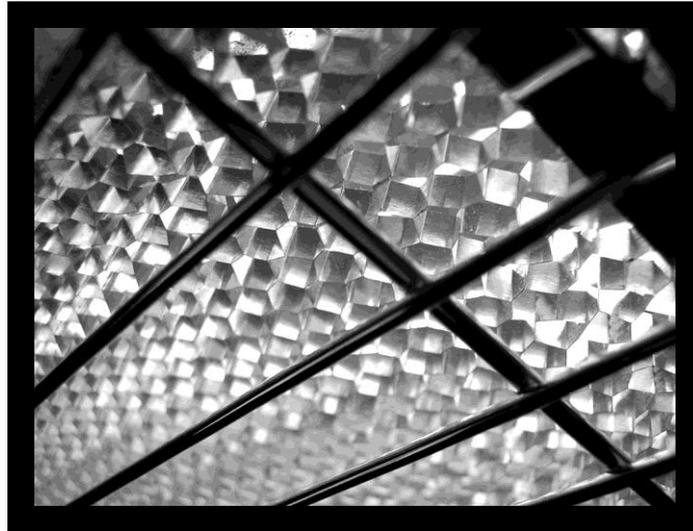


Image by "abmstudios"

Walking From His Parents' House

I trail behind the man and the dog,
carry my laptop on my hip as if it were a child.

When we get home I will sit on the floor
by the electric heater and balance
the computer on my thighs
while he settles down to play Grand Theft Auto.

And he loves me like the foster mother
who loves her teenage son so much
that it hurts her to hear the story
of the tattoos on his arms and throat,

the stuff that happened in juvie, the days
as a child he spent shut in a closet.

I will kiss him in blue light of the TV,
tell him I am going to sleep, but lie in the dark
instead and wonder if I should tell him
tonight's distance was due to nothing he did,
it's just that sometimes loss opens inside
me like a bowl, the only place that will hold
all that he does not wish to know.

Last Night I Hit You

but I thought you hit me.
I remember screeching, your hand
over my mouth. We have not talked
since and today I am driving around
Skagit County, following a truck
with a plastic tank and a diamond
that says "poison." I watch
the poison slosh. I hate my job.
I want to go to Portland.

I Imagine My Mother The Winter Of Her 29th Year

She is breathing in smoke
from the tips of cigarettes
puffed by women
in the windowless office,
wheeling her chair across Berber,
pulling files for employment security,
married ten years by now,
my father back from Alaska
with a new gut buttoned under
his plaid shirt, his beard grown
down over his throat. By now he's told her
he cheated. Between long shifts
packing asbestos around pipes
a woman walked into his room,
unbuttoned her blouse. He told my mother
this on the way to the steak house
to meet his brothers and their wives.
He told her this like last night
he told her he wanted a child,
the way he always asks
for a less dark slice of toast.
When she gets off work it is night.

Neon

She smells like stale smoke,
drops her clothes
on the floor lets her dark curls spill
on the pillow, closes her eyes,
not wanting love's hard thrusts.
Not even knowing if she still wants
the child that will come of them.

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Incident Reports: The Vanishing

Caitlin Elizabeth Thomson

Case File: No. 1

My husband was washing dishes,
his hands in those yellow rubber gloves,
the water running, a hum.
I looked up to a sink full of soap,
limp gloves on tiles.

Case File: No. 2

I scoured the woods on my own
after 9-1-1 was reduced to a busy signal.
Kept checking under the same log.
Your shovel, pink with a purple sparkled
handle, dug into the ground next to
a particularly pleasing pine.

Case File: No. 3

I left school early,
took the train to the sea,
smoked till dusk, heard

the news while waiting
on the platform. Listed among
the missing. I have
no need to go home.

Case File: No. 4

I cannot explain where the bulk
of my world went between breaths:
books float, the air has a blue
tinge and walls have started
to share their history
in pubescent voices.
I keep the last part to myself.

Case File: No. 5

When I wake, the laptops are still
snuggling, one on top of the other
She is not pressed in beside me,
not waiting in the kitchen
with a mug of coffee.

Case File: No. 6

We were alone on the top floor
of a building, mid construction,
no foreman barking orders.

Case File: No. 7

The stars thick above me,
fireflies coming out of the marsh,
mating. I leaned over to shake
my wife awake in her sleeping bag,
but the synthetic plaid
covered no one. I waited
two days, smoking
till my pack ran out.



Case File: No. 8

I might as well have been
in space, the circle of white
false light, that magnetic
hum. I cannot see them anymore,
the technicians in their scrubs.



Case File: No. 9

A house aflame.

Case File: No. 10

I find myself blaming him
for leaving his shirt on the sofa,
the half finished mantelpiece,



Image by Debbie Schiel

thin leaves of wood
curled on the landing.
Even weeks later his hairs
on the floor, brown strands
sticking to my socks.

Case File: No. 11

All that remains of him is a bruise
below my thigh, green tea yellow.

Case File: No. 12

Was it a matter of geographic positioning,
or did they do something right?
My boss, vanishing at the three hole punch,
certainly didn't believe in God.
I don't recall my barista
being generous, but I saw her picture,
shellacked to a telephone pole.

Case File: No. 13

I sat on the porch, lunchbox in hand,
until the red haired lady next door,
led me to her kitchen, piled a blue
plate full of gingerbread cookies,
pushed it in front of me.

Case File: No. 14

Rent is so cheap now.

I am alone on the top floor
of a brownstone. My landlord
loves hearing my
footsteps above her.

Case File: No. 15

The people on my block
crowd together, one
apartment building,
our home. Strangers
sharing rooms.

Case File: No. 16

Alone on the farm, I found out later.
But I still don't know for sure,
it could all be a hoax.
The man that delivers my milk
still pops by once a week.

Case File: No. 17

People no longer talk about loss
as if it is something only they feel.
We dance in public. If a wail
is heard we hug the stranger.
So familiar is the sound of our bodies
before they fall asleep.

Case File: No. 18

I miss a good conversation
about world politics or pie making.
Now it's always about missing,
loneliness, quiet.

Case File: No. 19

The church is full.

Case file: No. 20

Did you hear about any dogs
vanishing, cats disappearing,
like magicians assistants?
No. I didn't think so.

Case File: No. 21

To walk the streets of Toyko now,

is to dream. Still the buildings,
lights, but so few people. Touch
no longer an accident.

Case Files: No. 22

Damn your tears and tissue,
you survived, celebrate! Have beer,
smoke, shoot out the windows
of the house, now empty, next door.

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Contributors

Emily Darrell lives in Virginia and has published poetry and fiction at *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Wigleaf*, *Digital Americana*, and *Neon Literary Magazine* #22.

Claudine R. Moreau is a poet, physicist, amateur astronomer, mommy, runner, and photographer living in North Carolina. She still listens to the punk, goth, and new wave music she grew up on in the 80's, and she often tortures students enrolled in her physics and astronomy classes at Elon University with such musical selections. Many years ago, she was the poetry editor for the UK-based online ezine named *Comrades*. Her poetry currently appears in *Astropoetica* and *Oysters and Chocolate*, and appeared long ago in *The Bitter Oleander*, *The GW Review*, and *Arsenic Lobster* among others.

L.E. Butler is an American-born novelist living in West Yorkshire. Her first novel *Relief* was published in 2008. Her second, *Psyche's Torch*, is with an agent and seeking a publisher. When she's not writing, she works in a refugee law centre.

Omar Metwally is a metaphysician working on a PhD and an MD at the University of Michigan. He writes captions to portraits of haggard faces (ometwally.com).

Howie Good, a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, is the author of 10 poetry chapbooks, including *Visiting the Dead* (2009) from Flutter Press. His first full-length collection of poetry, *Lovesick*, has just been published by Press Americana. For more information, visit: americanpopularculture.com.

In addition to his poems "Alice After Her Adventures in Wonderland" and "Colonizing Ants in the Desert", which appeared in *Neon* #14, and "Fire Flowers," "The Things We

Become" and "Shadow of the Divine", which appeared in *Neon* #20, **Jonathan Greenhause's** poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared or is forthcoming in more than a hundred literary reviews around the world, including *Borderlands, Conclave, Going Down Swinging, Polluto, Soundings Review, and U.S. 1 Worksheets*. He makes his living as a Spanish interpreter and periodically leaves his professional cocoon to explore the world around him with his hilarious wife.

Tetman Callis's stories and poems have appeared in various publications, most recently *Caketrain, J Journal, and 580 Split*. Many of these published works are available on his website at www.tetmancallis.com. He has a bachelor's degree in philosophy and makes his living as a legal assistant.

Noel Sloboda teaches at Penn State York and serves as dramaturg for the Harrisburg Shakespeare Company. He is the author of the poetry collection *Shell Games* (2008) as well as two chapbooks: *Stages* (2010) and *Of Things Passed* (2010).

Rachel Mehl has an MFA from University of Oregon. She has published poems in *Alaska Quarterly Review, Pank, Natural Bridge, and Willow Springs*. She lives in Bellingham, WA and works for Community Action.

Caitlin Elizabeth Thomson has a Masters of Fine Arts in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared in the *Hart House Review, Imago, Short, Fast, and Deadly, Right Hand Pointing* and *The Toronto Quarterly*. Her first collection of poems *Selected Victims Of Ted Bundy* is forthcoming this fall from Jeanne Duval Editions.