

# Issue #26

[www.neonmagazine.co.uk](http://www.neonmagazine.co.uk)  
[neonmagazine@ymail.com](mailto:neonmagazine@ymail.com)

This compilation copyright © Neon Magazine (2011).  
Do not copy or redistribute without permission.

All content copyright © respective authors (2011).

Authors may be contacted through the publisher.

Cover image by Mario Alberto Magallanes Trejo.

ISSN 1758-1419 [Print]  
ISSN 1758-1427 [Online]

Edited by Krishan Coupland.

Published Quarterly.

# Contents

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| <b>Two Poems</b>      | <b>4</b>  |
| Grant Loveys          |           |
| <b>Two Poems</b>      | <b>9</b>  |
| Gregory Dunn          |           |
| <b>Pitch</b>          | <b>12</b> |
| L.E. Butler           |           |
| <b>Two Poems</b>      | <b>17</b> |
| Amy Schreibman Walter |           |
| <b>Two Poems</b>      | <b>23</b> |
| Ashley Maser          |           |
| <b>Safe Keeping</b>   | <b>26</b> |
| Nemone Thornes        |           |
| <b>Three Poems</b>    | <b>35</b> |
| C.J. Opperthausen     |           |
| <b>Contributors</b>   | <b>39</b> |



Image by Robert Linder

# Two Poems

Grant Loveys

## Torque

A dishevelled man placed his palm  
on my son's head and said  
"Hello, Mason."

We were on the number 8 bus.  
We had never seen this man before.  
The sky was the exact grey  
of the seats we were sitting on.

My son looked up at me  
and I could see a white-hot wire  
glowing behind his eyes.  
I said "He must have heard us talking,"  
because I didn't know  
what else to say.

The man got off a few stops later  
and folded himself into a gang of  
rainbowed teenagers waiting at the corner.  
I could see across the tops of buildings  
all the way to the city's rim.

I was waiting for everything to cave in on itself.

The bus crippled on down the street.

I imagined my son and I compacted  
into a dead black obelisk.

I felt the dishevelled man carving his name into us.

I felt our mingled blood well up in his letters.

My son said "How does the bus carry us?"

I said "The same way I carry you."

He nodded.

He didn't understand torque.

And I didn't tell him about it.

Not that kid,  
not that day.

**After Dark In The Engine Room**

At night  
black birthday cakes of oil  
stand thick and still  
in catchpans and the  
sore-throat fire ferrying  
the ship along dwindles  
to an ashy snuffle.

A man drags a woman off the  
port side, honeymoon drunk.  
Olympic in their  
descent, two stars  
falling straight into the  
moon's eye.

After dark in the engine room,  
the captain perches on  
an upturned lard bucket,  
his things laid before him--  
eighteen faded Parisian postcards,  
the big key labelled "GO"  
a cracked shaving mirror  
in which a momentary lipsticked

face appears and disappears,  
quick as a sneeze.

It's so quiet the sea stops slapping  
the hull, hides its reddened face.

All things on course.



Image by "Rachel1144"



# Two Poems

Gregory Dunn

## Northern Lights

They say if you listen carefully, you hear them hum. Not so much the music of the spheres as their vibration. Crackle. Fuzz. Static on the earth's shortwave as we glide the late-night skip, sifting through radio detritus, dialling in cosmic reruns and rumours, weather on the threes and traffic on the nines, Coast to Coast AM broadcasting tonight from Alpha Centauri, weary chatter of long-haul interstellar truckers as they ride solar tides through cold and lonely space.

I don't know about all that. Saw them once, a momentary shimmer above white pines dusted with hoarfrost rimming the far shore of some ice-crustled north country lake. It stopped me, to see the sky flash and bend like that, curtains green and gold then fading then gone. Leaving me standing shindeep in wet snow, neck bent, staring past the trees, past small bright stars, past the sky, even, and far into the emptiness.

**You're Not At The Top Of The Food Chain  
Here, My Friend**

Hiking alone and silent. Precisely what they say  
not to do. Two hundred feet ahead, downhill,  
downwind, he clammers onto the fire road. Big,  
shaggy, black, head swinging side to side, swings  
to look at me.

The old man said one slaughtered,  
flayed, hanging from the butcher's hook, looks like  
a man. He said if you eat his flesh, you dream you  
are him, padding through woods, snuffling leafmould,  
treebark, fernscent.

When the north wind, mouth  
full of winter, rushes across frozen lakes, and he  
slumbers--when I, too, slumber--does he dream? If he  
ate me, would he tonight slide through strange,  
empty streets, gut tight with urgency, chased by  
the faceless, the unnamed?

He crosses, slips into  
thickets, then cranes out his head, appraising me.  
You see me, but I also see you  
seeing me, he says. Take care.

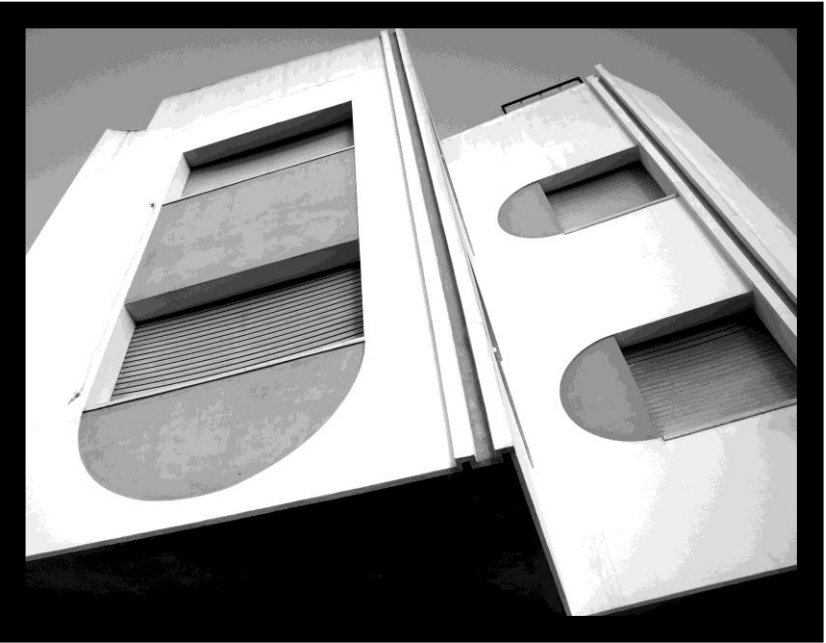


Image by Graham Briggs

# Pitch

L.E. Butler

So I'll start with a Prologue. Think of it as an appetiser; delicious but only half-satisfying, like a plate of steamed oysters. Something about girls not yet nineteen, playing in overgrown pastures, in the ocean. They braid sea-grass into their hair.

Act One. This is a long, tedious act. There's no incidental music, but there is the drone of heat-bugs, persistent and languid as a sitar, and the sick glare of a muggy sky. There's a young girl, and pretty much any guy who looks at her messes with her. This girl is our protagonist. She lets them mess with her because it's the only way she can get them to leave her alone. Tedious, long. You can take a bathroom break during this act and you won't miss much.

Act Two. This is a short act, with lurid, blistering light effects and many sharp edits. Fictive protagonist meets someone she loves and she moves in with him and suddenly the world is full of sound and oxygen. They live in the top floor of an old art deco hotel, on a hill overlooking the city. They're like kids in a tree house. It's always summer. They have parties, everyone sleeps on their floor. She gets up early to make pancakes. She stops having sex altogether and it's the sweetest holiday. He chases her around, sometimes, both of them hooting with laughter.

You can imagine some smoke effects here, a disco ball that shatters the light into a swarm of violet, white-hot bees.

"No, seriously." They say it at exactly the same moment, then struggle not to laugh. She wants to tell him that they don't need sex; it's something that will eventually disappear if they turn their backs on it long enough. Like any other chimera.

He leaves, and the Second Act comes to an end. It's kind of a weak act, that way.

Act Three. You need shimmering pastels here, like a very old silver-washed film, the kind in which the frames have been hand-painted: sugary watermelon pink, an azure that fairly hums, green like the bottom of a lake. The sun is painted in a paste made of gold dust and cream.

There's a beautiful man and he lays everything at the protagonist's feet. There should be a piano playing here, and a tenor singing something by Schumann.

Every bit of this man is exquisite. Her terrible secret is that she wants to tear him apart; she wants to fill her mouth with him; she wants to find and possess, like an alchemist, the shining matter at the heart of him.

The Third Act continues this way for a long time, with the wavering mercury-tinted colours. The piano accompaniment softens.

She can't say exactly when his eyes start to look darker, when his spine stiffens. Tendons pulse in his throat, his collarbone. "You're so angry," he confesses, and she doesn't know what he means. She's

so used to it, she scarcely notices the anger just under her flesh, trapped in her teeth. She doesn't feel it, really, until he points it out.

"Ignore it," she tells him, hearing for the first time the urgent snap in her voice, like bone cracking.

"I can't ignore it. I keep waiting for you to break."

She leans to kiss him and his cheek pales.

It seems like that would be the end of the act, but then there's this loopy montage of her walking around on the sidewalks, and people rushing up to her and asking about him, their eyes filling with soft stars at just the mention of his name.

There's an Epilogue, too. Tasteful, muted earth-tones. The clean lines of a digital recording.

An alarm clock rings. "Again," she says, in the pearly gloom. She can't help smelling her pillow, the way the lavender perfume settles into the cotton.

When she sees herself in the mirror she exhales and shakes her head incredulously. She looks so bright, like a bluebird ready to greet the sun. Her legs feel quick and light, wanting to stretch, wanting to run down the stairs instead of walk.

She can't go on one more day but her body won't acknowledge this. She spends the night dreaming of suicide and then in the morning her body, cruelly innocent and stupid, wants to wear pink, wants chocolate bread for breakfast.

She's stopped looking at people, although she sometimes notices delicate hands, or a cheek cool and fresh as a cloud-covered

sky. She'll pass whole days without meeting anyone's eyes. But while she's alive, she can't stop chasing pleasure, or pretending she's letting it chase her. She creeps around the internet and bookstores and concerts, following obscure little seams of brilliance and candour.

Sleeping pills usually pull her under before she can figure all of this out. She wakes to the sound of her own breathing.

Image by Teri Gosse





# Two Poems

Amy Schreibman Walter

## The Frustration Of Barbie

She sits astride Ken,  
knees stained, hair  
a shade  
of bottled midnight.

She wants his hands  
cupped right around  
her two terrific tan  
peaks. Metal zips her in,  
leather licks them both.

She is sixties sexual pleasure  
sitting pretty.

She touches him  
in the ways she has read  
that men like it.

She doesn't understand why  
he isn't responsive.  
Under his clothes, she feels nothing.  
His eyes, a sad-looking stare

## Neon

---

in blue paint.

His three-piece suit is slipping.  
She lowers his grey pants to his ankles.  
Naked, Ken is missing a man part;  
his crotch, a sick joke.

She brings her little pursed lips  
to his hairless chest, then to his lips.  
She smells like ripe strawberries.  
Kissing Ken is like  
kissing the dead.

His plastic hands grope at her mountains,  
his smile fixed in place.  
Her eyeliner is heavy as her heart.  
After so much of this, she will soon think  
herself better than this humiliation.  
There are parties to attend.

She leaves him  
staring up at the sky.  
This is the last time she'll try.  
Adjusting her black wig,  
Puffing on a Marlboro Light,  
she climbs into her car.

Slamming the car door, glittery silver  
decals fall off plastic, tumble to grass.  
It's her Dream Car, the one with the roof  
that comes off. She likes the wind  
in her hair on open country roads.

Plastic stiletto against plastic brake pad,  
tiny fingers grasp the gearstick;  
she has big thoughts.  
She knows she shouldn't cry over Ken,  
she knows she needs a man  
who will satisfy her, touch her,  
break her silence--  
she is liberated, liberated.

He took her to balls; he took her horse riding.  
He painted her house, took her to the beach--  
but never that. That, he couldn't do.  
Sunglasses hide her tears,  
her leather catsuit shifts softly  
against her hourglass waist.

She steps on it. There are places to go.  
She is liberated, liberated.  
Glistening with potential,

## Neon

---

Barbie drives herself  
off a cliff on the coastal road,  
losing her head, wetting her wig.

Barbie is wasted.  
Thin thighs splayed  
as if she were  
a virgin cheerleader,  
simply doing a split.

## Unfinished

The portrait is not finished, you tell me.

I am not finished.

Loose legs on three canvases.

Two propped up against the wall.

Fingers on fingers.

Fingers on canvas.

Unfinished.

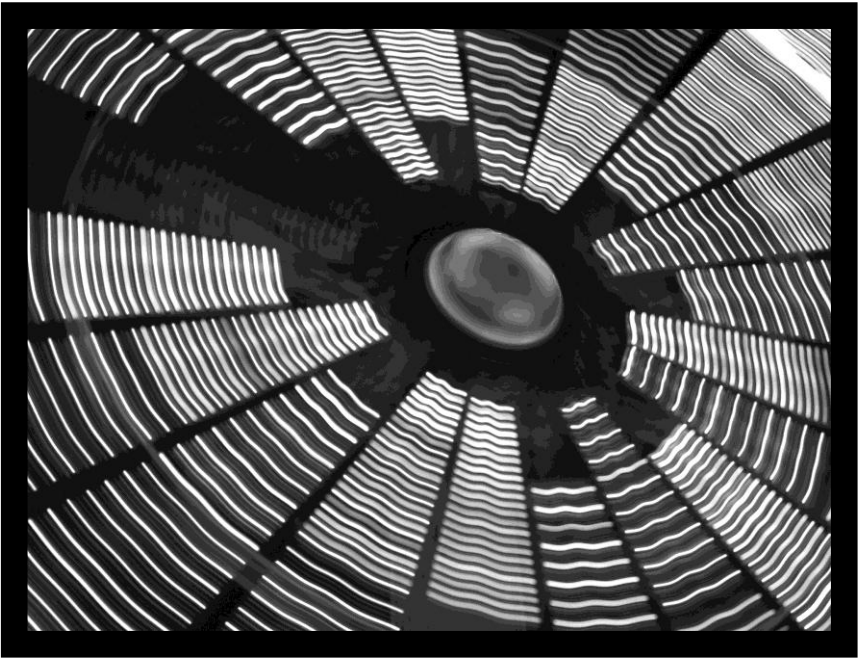


Image by John Nyberg

---

# Two Poems

Ashley Maser

## The Leaving

It doesn't matter how it feels, or tastes, or looks,  
like loose gravel turning itself over at the edge of the drive,  
or viewing the world through the silver celluloid of windshield frost.  
Like cold hands under hot water, the sensation of blood returning,  
the opening of fingers and veins. The blindness of standing up  
too quickly. The mushroom cloud of milk that dissipates in your mug  
these December mornings, or the clean cold of kitchen tile. They've  
left

a plate in the sink--tomatoes, basil, a few stray noodles.  
A jacket on the back of the recliner, toothbrush, watch, books. And you  
pack these things away, throw them out, and more--you unfold  
pleated pants and drop them into trash bags, disinfect  
the bathroom, change your sheets, sew new drapes. When you've  
emptied  
the house, the closets, the fridge, get on your knees, dust the  
woodwork,  
put your palms to the floor, feel the rug, the carpet, everything you've  
come to own.

### Emergence Of The Robot

The gun metal surface  
of lake, stream; stripped screw  
roots bolting oak to earth.  
Bodies red-blue with circuits  
of muscle and vein.

Mounts and spacers, rivets  
of rock in valleys, the cooling fan  
of magnolia leaves turning  
like the gear shaft  
axis of Earth, Sun--the black  
tongue of belt and chain  
lapping at the sky.





Image by Nick Fletcher

# Safe Keeping

Nemone Thornes

The cold storage plant is right on the water. Acres of metal the colour of dried sage. Some sections are taller than others. From here it looks like giant boxes plonked down next to each other, but when you get up close you can see it's all joined.

The land slopes sharply upwards from the shore, so we have a good view of the plant, and the water. A line moves along the Sound, like a length of rope just under the surface. A wave trying to form. They never do.

Brendan and Matthew and I are having dinner at a place on the edge of the service town. We're sitting outside because this is what they call summer, but it isn't warm. It stays light until the early hours, and the light always seems the same. Very flat. Not much real sun. At the moment, the clouds are aubergine.

There's the clank of crates rolling in or out of the container ship docked against the run of loading bays. We don't know what's in the crates. They say it's food. I have the recurring idea that it's all the same stuff, that it goes off on voyages and then eventually comes back unopened.

It's day six. The end of day six. I've signed on for five years. Not sure that was a good idea.

What we do, all of us foreigners, is monitor the plant, tend it, keep it the right temperature, just above freezing. Matt has the most complicated job: fixing the machinery if there are malfunctions. He's an engineer.

Tomorrow is our first day off, and we decide we'll go walking in the rocky hills that rise behind the town. When we've finished the meal, we move on to a bar. We run into Dixie, who's also new. She was on our flight over. There aren't many women here. We ask her if she'd like to go on the walk with us.

The next morning, after a couple of hours, we find a valley with a single railway line running along its floor. There's a high bridge over the line, and we go down to it. Dixie sees the thing on the tracks first.

"It's a body."

The track is a long, long way below the bridge. Matt has binoculars.

"It's a skeleton."

We take turns. It is a skeleton. Not a clean one; bits of old tissue are still sticking to it. It's dark, like those mummies that people find in bogs. Brendan thinks that as well as the remains of tissue, it's wearing clothes. Shreds of trousers, at least.

We wait for a long time, but no train comes. I want to see a train go through the body, and I wonder if the others feel the same.

Later in the afternoon, as we're heading back, Brendan tells us the stories he's been hearing from the old hands.

"Sometimes weird fish come in on the boats. Mutants, that kind of thing. They keep them. They've got a special pool, just for strange fish. And there's a plesiosaur. Ture swears there is."

"Has he actually seen it?" asks Dixie.

Ture hasn't. Brendan says we should look for the pool, but Dixie won't because she thinks it's just a story. Matt won't because he's worried about getting into trouble for poking around.

"I'm not sure it would go down too well if we said we were looking for a secret pool with a plesiosaur in it," he says. "As excuses go, it doesn't sound very convincing. We'd probably be on the first plane out." I tell Brendan I'll look for the pool with him. I'm not too distressed by the thought of finding myself on a plane out.

Towards the end of the second week, Matt says he's fed up of the company accommodation, and he rents a log cabin just outside the town. Dixie and I go up to see it.

It's full of Platonic solids. Tetrahedrons and icosahedrons and the rest. I knew Matt before we came here; he's the only one I did know. He was messing about with Platonic solids in England, but now he's taken them up in a big way. He's made about twenty already, cut from thin steel, all about the same size as a fist.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with them, but I can't seem to stop."

"Typical obsessional male behaviour," Dixie says, on the way back. Next day, at lunch in the underground cafeteria, deep below the warehouses, she makes cubes out of slices of toast held together with

toothpicks. She cuts the crusts off with surgical care, to form perfect squares.

In the third week, Brendan says he's found something promising, and he asks me to go with him for a deeper investigation. We tell Dixie where we're going. She changes her mind and wants to come too, but I say we need someone to stay behind, in case we get trapped somewhere. It's supposed to be just cold storage, but Brendan's heard that there are deep-freeze rooms. I don't know if Brendan attracts rumours, or if he deliberately goes looking for them. Anyway, if there really are deep-freeze rooms, we don't fancy getting stuck in one.

It's a long cold walk. At the end of it, I'm impressed by what Brendan's discovered--a plain iron door, about four metres high by two wide, behind a tall stack of crates. It's not on the official map of the complex. It has three bolts on the bottom half. They were painted red, but most of the paint has flaked off. Looks like they've had a lot of use.

I think we'll have a job with the door, but it opens easily. Behind it is a narrow corridor, only wide enough for one person. Wide door, very narrow corridor--I turn that one over as I follow Brendan into the darkness. We've brought torches.

The corridor slopes downwards, which makes me think of abattoirs. After five minutes or so the corridor ends at a steep, deeply ridged metal ramp. I think of abattoirs even more.

At the end there's a massive room--another warehouse. Way up on the high ceiling, there are small lights. There's just enough light to see by.

"I didn't really believe it," Brendan says.

In the middle of the concrete floor there is a huge square pool, about forty metres from side to side. In the dim light, it looks like black glass. It's almost flush with the ground, the surface of the water is only a couple of centimetres lower. There's no edging round it, no steps into it.

It's warm in here.

We walk around the pool. When we reach the third side, we see movement. There are pale things, quite a long way down.

"Fish," I say.

"They look more like worms," Brendan says. He's right.

A shape breaks the surface, out in the middle.

"See that?" says Brendan.

"I saw it."

"A fin. The plesiosaur. All true."

"Or something with fins."

For half an hour or so we stare into the pool, lie down at its edge, shine the torches into it. We see more worms.

We go back, and find Dixie in the cafeteria. She's using her bacon to make something complicated. We tell her about the pool and the thing with fins, and she says she has to see it. Then we decide to go out walking again tomorrow, which is a day off for all of us.

Dixie plays around with the bacon for the entire meal. "Look," she says eventually. "Dodecahedron. With crispy rind."

The next day, we follow the same route into the hills. We haven't discussed it, but I think we all want to know if the body is still there.

It is. We look through the binoculars again, then we sit on the hillside and come up with theories. None of them fit. Eventually we continue the walk, but before we go very far, there's the sound of a train. We get back down the hill to the bridge as quickly as we can; we're scrambling, trying to run. When we reach it we can see the departing train very small in the distance, a pale blue, blocky thing that reminds me of the warehouses.

The body is still there, lying across both rails. The train went right through it. It looks untouched, exactly the same. No one says much for the rest of the walk.

We leave Matt in the town, but soon he comes down to find us. There's something in his cabin, but he won't say what. We all walk up there together. In the end, he can't wait until we get to his place to tell us.

"The Platonic solids...they've turned into boats."

We find them all squashed into boat shapes, and each now has a slim steel tube for a mast. We look carefully, and realise that the plastic sails are cut from margarine containers. English ones. "Omega 3" it says on one. "I can't believe it's not" on another.

"I only went out for ten minutes," says Matt. "No one could have done it in that time."

"I quite like them," says Dixie.

We stay with Matt for a while. On the way back, we decide that as he's so freaked out about the Platonic solids, we'll go to the pool again tomorrow, and we'll talk him out of his caution and take him with us. It will give him something else to think about. We were going to ask him to be our just-in-case man, but we know what's in there now. I worry about those bolts on the outside of the door, though.

The next morning I walk to the plant with Brendan. There's a flat barge drawn up at the loading bays. It's painted the colour of rust, and it's not carrying the usual sealed crates. The handlers are unhanding the catch straight into the facility. We get closer, and see that it looks like fat worms.

It strikes us both: the plesiosaur. They're feeding it. We decide to leave going to the pool for another day. There'll possibly be activity down there.

In the morning, we go. All four of us. As we come to the end of the corridor, I can see that the room is lighter.

The pool is gone. There's nothing but a concrete floor. It looks like the same concrete floor, with the same marks and stains. It looks like it's been there a long time.

"A big wind-up, then," says Dixie.

"On my mother's life," says Brendan. "It was here."



In the corner we find a pile of small icosahedrons made of thin steel. Matt swears they aren't his.

"God, it's cold in here," Dixie says, and her breath forms aubergine clouds.



Image by Robert Linder

# Three Poems

C.J. Opperthausen

## The City's Teeth

Sweetness of the city's teeth  
on mine, kiss of bones, ragged.

Hot street steam hissing  
out of its heart, dusty and cold,

a conductor's song of water pipes  
and remnants of train stations

in its gray veins. The river,  
that brown, soft sister, cools

the city's back. Detroit, you old  
bruise, you were beautiful. Now,

your voice is gone, your lungs  
pump ash, sometimes bullet

shells. Your teeth are yellow,  
Motown, your spine

brittle and dusty. Dimmer  
is the helicopter shot of your night,

your skyline. Your people, your  
breath, wedge through cracks

to other rust belt notches. Detroit,  
you old bruise, you were beautiful.

### Lung Symphony In C Major

A cello suite playing,  
the breathing, shuffs  
of clothing. There is a human

making this.

This is no cosmic machine,  
no moonlit symphony of giants.  
This cellist might have addictions,

maybe a dozen empty bottles  
beside the supersonic microphone,  
unaware of Daughter's phone-calling, downstairs  
(ringing).

---

## A Thousand Dead Blackbirds Fall From The Sky

They say it might have been lightning,  
maybe hail. It might have been fireworks  
on New Year's Eve, drunken truckers

boot-snuffing the smouldering matches.  
Somehow, they all died. A quick airborne  
heart-stop--engines turned off. Wind

plucked feathers from wings twisting maniacally,  
marionettes cut loose from their strings--  
some skyward cemetery gutted open, raining

onto cars, small thuds on the roofs  
of homes and barber shops, bird bones  
breaking on impact. But who says the laws

of nature apply to these birds? Maybe this flock  
gave up on the new year, a mass suicide  
in protest of the shit to come. Maybe

acrophobia hit after years of cloud-  
kissing. Maybe they just got sick  
of flying, knowing they'd never really fall.



Image by Jascha Hoste

---

# Contributors

**Grant Loveys** lives in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada. His work has appeared in numerous literary publications, including *Fractured West* and *Carte Blanche*.

**Gregory Dunn** lives in and writes from Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is the greenhouse manager for Trillium Haven Farm, a CSA in Jenison, Michigan, and intermittently blogs about his experiences there at [sparrowinthehall.blogspot.com](http://sparrowinthehall.blogspot.com). His work has been published most recently in *Eclectica Magazine*.

**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.

**Amy Schreibman Walter** is an American living in London. The idea for "The Frustration Of Barbie" came to her when she found a Barbie lying in the attic, half-clothed and placed on top of a Ken doll. The timing of this discovery coincided with an assignment she had been given in a poetry class she was taking: "write a poem about a toy who comes to life." Her work has been published in print and online on both sides of the Atlantic. Visit her at: [www.amyschreibmanwalter.com](http://www.amyschreibmanwalter.com).

**Ashley Maser** is currently pursuing an English degree from Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She has previously interned with the *Dos Passos Review* and her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Foundling Review*, *Writers' Bloc*, *Word Riot*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, *INCITE*, *Foliolate Oak*, *Camroc Press Review*, *Sleet Magazine*, *The Driftwood Review*, and *Bearing North*, an anthology distributed by The Quiet Press.

**Nemone Thornes** was born in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, and grew up in a small town near Huddersfield. Since starting to write serious short fiction in 2007, she has won prizes or been shortlisted in over twenty literary competitions. Her stories have been published by *Leaf Books*, *Writers' Forum*, *The Yorkshire Post* and *New Short Stories 5*, the anthology of the 2011 Willesden Herald Prize.

**C.J. Opperthausen** is a Michigander. His poems have appeared in *Word Riot*, *Temenos*, and *The Orange Room Review*, among other places. He likes to run and fish. He blogs at [thicketsandthings.tumblr.com](http://thicketsandthings.tumblr.com).