

Sten·o

An Anthology

From the Writer's Workshops
at Old Growth Northwest

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely representing the word "Steno" in a stylized or calligraphic form. The text is arranged in several lines, with some characters appearing to be stylized or combined.

Edited by Erin Fried

Sten•o

An Anthology

From the Writer's Workshops at Old Growth Northwest

Edited by Erin Fried

Old Growth Northwest

Old Growth Northwest fosters creative collaboration and exchange within a robust and diverse community of writers and readers in the Pacific Northwest. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Seattle, Old Growth Northwest serves the greater Pacific Northwest region, including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, and Alaska.

In addition to the Writer's Workshops, offered continuously in eight-week facilitated sessions at local coffee shops, Old Growth hosts a variety of programs for free or at a low cost to the public:

- Bi-monthly Reading and Open Mic event series
- POPLORISH, a literary magazine
- Gay Romance Northwest Meet-Up, a literary conference
- One-on-one consulting for writing at all stages of development

For more information on these and other programs, please visit our website: www.oldgrowthnw.org.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Lay This Stone <i>By Brian E. Langston.....</i>	7
The Big Book of Answers <i>By Matthew Spencer.....</i>	8
Said the Dragonfly to the Nymph <i>By Ian Greenfield.....</i>	10
Inheritance <i>By Alexander Haddad.....</i>	14
At Arms End.....	19
Dusty Corners.....	21
Shadow / Box.....	22
And Nat King Cole Sang <i>Smile</i> on the Radio.....	23
<i>By D.R. Amromin</i>	
Hunger <i>By Nick Schwarzenegger.....</i>	25
Arianna and Amaranth <i>By Sam Moss.....</i>	26
Contributing Author Biographies.....	34

Introduction

When Old Growth Northwest began its programming in the spring of 2013, we sought to create a structured environment for local writers to share resources and experience. The Writer's Workshops were born out of a desire to provide a collaborative space where writers could refine their work and develop supportive relationships.

This anthology contains writing from participants who attended Old Growth's first workshop in the summer of 2013. Together, we met on the back patio of a coffee shop in Seattle's University District. Over the course of an eight-week intensive workshop, participants shared work, met with local authors, editors, and professors, and found humor in each other's exploits.

Many thanks to Café Solstice for accommodating nine budding writers. We are also grateful to our participants for their consistent engagement and exceptional contributions to our conversations and to this text. What luck that we might stumble upon such incredible talent so early in our work.

To the reader of this book: consider the great benefit of collaboration. Consider what might be possible if we, as writers, were to venture out beyond the confines of our own private hermitages and share, face to face, with one another. Through these workshops, through the mentoring relationships that we hope to build between established and newer writers, and through a panoply of other programs, events, and services, we hope to create a community of support that exceeds the limits of what might be had through intermittent exchanges.

Warmly,

Erin Fried
Editor

Lay This Stone

By Brian E. Langston

Lay this stone, perfect, broken
Beside my body

Do not ask for reasons from the river
What does the river know?
She follows only gravity

Do not ask for forgiveness from the sun
Perpetual immolator
He knows nothing except to burn

But this stone? Lay it, broken, perfect
Beside my body

It understands a thing
About grieving

The Big Book of Answers

By Matthew Spencer

Life as forward motion—so it was with Caleb Morse early one morning in June. He was hurrying through the streets of downtown Olympia, or rather, was being hurried by his mother Caitlin (her manicured hand tight around his shoulder), a lawyer just barely out of her twenties. She had considered leaving the boy to himself, but an incident at another hotel the week before involving adult pay-per-view charges had convinced her otherwise. His father, usually gone during the summer, was attending a trade junket in Macau and could not have been convinced to take his son along. Perhaps out of some vague feeling of parental obligation, he had sent Caitlin a handwritten semi-legible fax the night before, advising her to “let him Caleb find his way,” advice that she consciously tried to ignore as she navigated the empty streets towards the offices of state government uptown, her son in tow. Heading up the agenda was a conference with various minor state officials regarding “repetitive stress injuries in the resource extraction industries”. The meeting promised to be vaguely significant in a careerist sense, though Caitlin could not shake a definite feeling of anti-climax, which had, like a bank of fog rolling over a coastal village, cast itself over everything. With the local university closed for the season and the legislature barely operating under a special session, the city appeared almost entirely deserted, as if mother and child had woken, dressed, eaten a continental breakfast, and stumbled onto a post-human world. Caleb felt the absence, too. He looked for signs of life as they passed along the vacant storefronts. The city seemed conjured out of some fever dream of adult drudgery. Then, as they turned onto Washington Street, he caught sight of a book nestled in a display window. Stopping a moment, he craned his neck to see the title, which the shadow of the awning and the darkened interior of the store partially obscured. The cover was upholstered in fake leather, like a Gideon Bible, with a riveted spine and letters embossed in silver ink. The title read *The Men’s Big Guide to Big Questions (An Unfiltered Look at Sex, Money, Sports, Travel, and Everything Else You Should Give a Damn about Ever)*. It was as if Caleb were being offered manhood itself. He saw a succession of doors opening along an infinite hallway. Caitlin felt her son loosen himself from her hand, as if some discrete pocket of gravity had taken hold of Caleb and pulled him towards the shop window. She turned to see what was keeping him. And there, along the surface of the glass, she saw the face of her child interposed with the cover of the book. A spasm of laughter suddenly welled up from within her—too late to stifle entirely. The world around Caleb resolved itself back into shape—the street, the storefront, his mother. Her voice seemed to grow as it reached his ear, ringing

out against the dome of the State Capitol shining brightly in the distance. That evening, in a different city and some twenty years later, Caleb left the subway station on West 4th Street and crossed Washington Square Park. The air had yet to turn heavy with the summer. He had nothing planned for the evening but walked briskly in spite of that – a habit he'd unconsciously acquired during his half-decade in New York. He edged along a crowd of tourists near the park fountain. On the grass, a bearded man wearing a denim kilt attempted to swallow a sword while another juggled a crystal ball along the contours of his bare chest. Caleb felt a vague but unshakeable sense that he would remember this moment again, at some unexpected time in a distant city, where life took some unimaginable form. The thought of future memories elicited others more concrete. He recalled the time when he told his parents, separately, that he was moving to the city in order to “make it”, almost mouthing the words aloud as he passed under the Washington Arch. Their reactions had been differing, inconclusive, both given in the form of advice, which he had not solicited. His mother said simply “do good work and take care of yourself,” while his father, then on his second marriage, launched into a monolog on the subject of “personal dynamism” and the virtues of resilience. Still lost in thought, Caleb he made his way through the narrow streets towards St. Marks Place. He slackened his pace as he passed the sidewalk stalls where vendors were packing up their merchandise for the day. There, among the disordered piles of trade paperbacks and outdated textbooks, he spotted a certain title in the periphery of his vision. Pausing in front of a table marked career/self-help/dating/misc nonfiction, Caleb hesitated for a moment, looked about him, then picked up the book. As he thumbed through the contents, a mishmash of sports anecdotes, survival accounts, product reviews, financial advice and tales of sexual adventure, he realized that the book had laid a secret claim over his life, its open pages forming the double arc of a bridge between that moment and the next. The streets swelled with people released from the business of the day. A gentle wind pushed the young leaves overhead. The vendor, his wares now almost packed up, asked for the book, which Caleb handed over without ceremony. Walking further down the street, he took his phone from his back jeans pocket and dialed his mother. Full evening had come now, but across the country there would be daylight still – a chance to explain everything that had happened between then and now.

Said the Dragonfly to the Nymph

for J.M. Barrie

By Ian Greenfield

I: This City in Winter

paints our childhood

in collages of memory
and the fairytales I tell myself
when I need to know how I should live

and are there faces looking back
through these reflection-clouded windows,
do hands gather winter banquets
for beloved others behind those doors?

This place is seaside, transcendent, blurred in my recollection.
The gulls follow the sleek ships out of harbor and do not return.
How long since I saw the ocean last?

This city:
I am half-awake,
and I've never seen anything more beautiful.

What did you think when you saw it, passing through?
I do not remember.
Now I see the fruit of blue-collar passion,
and boardroom perdition simmering below,
where the concrete and green glass edge the bay—
but up here, near forests still living,
only homes, and youths gone to blossom and rot.

(I wish you were here.)

Approaching long-fingered trees I think,
perfect was then, but where am I now?
What happened to that park,
cradle of my fantasy for too long
among the close green leaves?

Where are you?

This city is the very museum of my past.
 I only have to peel back its faces like moss
 to find what lovers carved in the wood
 some time ago.

Old cobbled streets, murder to cars,
 lined with venerable houses,
 full of venerable people,
 swallow me as I retrace a path
 I know so well it haunts me.

Have I ever been this way before?

The ravine where dragons slumbered once
 is the brown of the longest sleep.
 I see farther now among the bare trees,
 see right down to the ghosts walking the forest floor
 like dandelion seeds blowing on the wind.

Above the switchback into the chasm
 I ask myself, where are you—

along these precarious fringe trails looking on,
 or below,
 in the spaces between the trees and the specters
 of people too beautiful to be alive,
 though they walk in the valley of the shadow of the city;
 what poorly-worn path drew your feet to revelation?

II: there is only one road in this wilderness

Down here where it's twilight before its time,
 the wind is teething on trees
 and the sky has turned plum and razorblade gray.

This is the city's core, its hollow taproot,
 a line of untouched earth,
 its only blemish this footpath.

The trees along the roadside hid castles,
 memories of banditry in far-flung glades,
 half-remembered heroism in autumnal mud.

In one of these nameless keeps you must have stayed
 when you walked this way.
 For how can our pasts cross without crossover?

One thing they never tell in fairy-tales
 is the dreadful finality
 in the stride of the ones who walk through the otherworld gates.
 I have learned this, imagining myself passing through,
 and so I fear I will never go
 should the world open a way.

And open it is. I can smell it on the air.

In this land of forgotten dragons,
 what is unwritten is possible.
 I go afraid on these ash-lined paths,
 slick with months-dead leaves,
 and sometimes I think the world is waiting
 to spirit me through a fairy-door of cinders and wind,
 (but that will never happen to me, I said).
 Did you find a way, and therefore go,
 and did I miss the whisper of your departure?

The sky, soft and steel-cold, hides the answers
 behind a thousand cirrus veils
 and the dazzle of a sunset
 whose heart has gone down behind the hills
 on which a city, now small and old,
 waits for the living to come home.

And the air,
 the air is bright with the scent of the sea.

III: The Littoral Zone

These swaying trees part into nude copses,
 prayers in a seizure,
 clawing at the blind abalone shimmer of the clouds.

Like a blanket of night on the earth before me
 is the foam-dusted shroud of the sea,
 and set on the shore is the sign I seek,
 lonely as a single trail of footprints.

You are out there, it says,
plainly as a letter from the dragonfly to the nymph.
Here was your fey archway, this black shadow of the city
 painted across the eastern bay,
 steeple of the elect on the waters.

There is a rankness of seaweed on the wind.
 You said nothing to me
 of the flavors of the ocean,
 the music of the deep currents.

You didn't look back.
 What richer faith is there than that?
 You weren't made like mortal folk.
You knew the door was ajar.

Until the peach light of evening leaves the air
 the way after you is open.

IV: Faust

You don't come out of the waters.
No moment spared for a halfway heart
by those on the Odyssean lanes.
I turn back, into the dry sunset with my bare fists clenched.
The night is coming, to the place where nocturnes sleep.

The air is so cold it smells like fire.

Inheritance

For Seneca

By Alexander Haddad

At first it was dark. Soft noises. A tremulous patter, your siblings' bare feet scuttling over filthy carpet. The plaintive rhythm of your mother's heart. (Drawing hard against your allotted nipple, you felt her pulse quicken.) You knew warmth, were aware of its absence. You slept in a tumultuous mass of sisters and brothers, all huddled, nameless, equal in your nudity. Innocent.

You began to see. You saw your mother, her soft eyes, her coarse dark hair flecked with gray. When your teeth grew in you ate the food that was provided. At first you enjoyed the taste, malty and sweet. Then you became numb to it, for it was the same food every day, and your eating, like that of all the others, became a habit. One sibling, an older boy from a different father, showed you how to drink water from the spigot. You were glad for it: you drank and drank. Sometimes you were not even thirsty. You did it just because. Days skipped abruptly into nights. You liked the nighttime. It was quietest then.

During the daytime you were alert. You had no choice but to be. There were noises, flashes of light, fleeting glimpses of huge animals passing at a distance. Your house, and the earth with it, would rumble and quake. For the daytime was the province of the beasts: your predators; your captors; your adversaries; you did not have a name for them; you knew only that you feared them, and that was enough. Fear was their immutable quality, their reason for being. You knew it without anyone telling you.

The worst times, those times that filled you with terror, were when the beasts came close enough to touch. They shoved their long bony appendages through the door of your family's home, clumsy, brushing tenuously against your kin. Only the most brazen or stupid approached the beasts outright. Once you saw a teenager, headstrong and full of vigor, attack one of the beasts, drawing blood. The wounded creature withdrew with stunning alacrity. It howled like a thousand of you, stomped off, then returned, armor-clad. Your kinsman, possessed with the furious insanity of a righteous youth, fought and bit and shrieked. Then, in a moment, he was gone.

Every few days, like clockwork, one of your clan got caught. The choice was indiscriminate, like a lottery. One, sometimes two at a time, your siblings were carried away. They did not return. You went about your life, long stretches of boring comfort punctuated by the trauma of total helplessness.

During the quiet times, did you ever think it would happen to you? Or was it enough just to be grateful, after every awful raid, that you were among those spared?

On the day that your turn came you were dozing by the spigot, covered in droplets of water. Smooth and slick, like a newborn. You liked being wet. It kept you cool.

You awoke to the feeling of those long appendages reaching in, wrapping themselves around your midsection, cupping beneath your jaw. You screamed and struggled and tried to run, but they gripped you too tight. Drawn skyward, you looked down at your mother. She lay there, breathing heavily, staring up at you as you ascended; then you passed out of sight. The beast held you against its body as it moved in great lunging strides across the plain. You would have struggled, but the only thing you could do was breathe, see, hear, smell, and be still. The sounds of others living nearby, neighboring clans, clattered from all directions; their stench spread over you in wave after wave. Your eyes bulged globelike, barely blinking, in the harsh light of the day. You saw other creatures too, heard them calling to each other, heard them rustling about in some dark sanctuary, out of sight but a part of your world, also living, also aware – they must be – of your life and consciousness, if only as something Other.

The beast set you down on a floor not unlike your own, in a dwelling not unlike your own; not unlike it, but different. Four walls and a ceiling, iron bars over all of them. Darkness, but artificial: the wrong color for night. Here, too, there was a spigot. Here, too, food. You did not eat or drink. You felt as though this place was someone else's home. It smelled vaguely of your siblings, at once like them and not. The memory, raw and confusing, made your stomach hurt. You sat in a corner and cried.

You felt yourself moving. The whole structure moved while you sat motionless. Then it stopped. Momentarily the darkness subsided. You watched the artificial night being pulled back from above, torn away and swallowed again by the daylight. Another beast, a different one, hunched over you. It moved differently, smelled strange. It stood up and moved away. It was supplanted in an instant by a different creature, smaller and quicker. It exuded the smell of something dangerous, violent. It rammed itself into the bars with all its bodily might; pressed against the wall, you felt its claws tear into your back, and so you ran and pressed against the other wall, and again, you felt its claws graze your skin; you turned and ran to the center of the room, away from the walls, and, looking up, saw its eyes popping, sharp teeth flashing, the crenellated ceiling of its mouth extending back into darkness. Its rancid breath moved through your lungs like an agent of death. You closed your eyes, felt the ground shake. The larger beast returned, plucked your tormentor from its vantage, bellowing, stomping; both creatures drew away like angered storm clouds on the move. When your awareness of your surroundings returned, you smelled something primal and alkaline. You were crouched in a puddle of your own urine.

Night fell. A light shone into the room; you felt the beast rumbling about somewhere close by. You dozed, awoke, dozed again. You heard the beast approaching. You hoped it would not come for you, but it did. It unlatched the door, bending the iron bars back until they snapped open. The enclosure sounded a dull ring, a slow decrescendo, the sound waning unevenly like a million off-sized tuning forks. You were too frightened to move; again, you urinated, but it was no deterrent to the beast. It plucked you from the spot where you cowered, under the spigot, and carried you into its dwelling. Powerful noises and smells, awesome to behold, cascaded over your being, drowning your thoughts. Your only awareness was Fear.

You smelled something different. Something else. Below, far below, a garden, an artificial habitat, encased in glass on five sides, open to the air but covered in metal latticework on the sixth side, which was the top. Without relaxing its grip on your belly, the beast pulled the latticework away. You saw blocks of wood, a fallen tree. Boulders. A cistern half full with water, its surface pulsing with the lowest tones of the surrounding cacophony. The beast bellowed, softer than before, and lowered you swiftly into the garden. You leapt onto the ground, turned around, looked for a hole through which to escape; but the beast was faster, had lowered the metal grille back over the entrance, and you,

Fear,

were trapped once again.

Above you, beyond the grille, a light shone down into the garden. It was blinding and hot. Your sense of time was badly jarred. Stertorous and alert, you backed yourself up against the fallen tree. You felt your own pulse coursing through your neck, in your ears, against your back. After a time your heartbeat slowed. You turned your head towards the ground and closed your eyes, whimpering. You remembered your mother, her soft eyes, her coarse dark hair flecked with

The tree was moving.

It pulled sideways, out from under your back and head, smooth, almost slick against your downy hair. Moving. Straightened, then coiled. You darted away as fast as you could, your eyes bulging from your face, heart exploding from the effort of your flight. You felt your body slam into glass; your ears rang from the impact. You turned around to watch the huge serpent lift itself off the ground. Now an arrow-shaped head dangled pendulous in the air above you. Eyes, black like a doll's, smaller than yours, blinking slowly. It swayed from side to side with quiet susurrations, gently, treelike even, swaying the way a tree is meant to sway, but also menacing. Predatory. Animal.

Minutes passed. (For you, it was hours.) The serpent continued its dance, tracing a widening arc like a pendulum given more and more slack, until finally its whole body came to rest on the ground. The head moved, seemingly dragging its body, until it was level with the cistern. A tongue, black and bifurcated, lapped at the water, throwing wild reflections against the glass, the ground, your face. You watched them play over the ground like tiny creatures demonic and perverse, delighting in your terror. The predator swayed, regarding you coolly. You did not move, hardly even breathed, just waiting. Finally the snake turned away, head dragging body, coiling and recoiling around the boulders until it lay shining and slick, motionless once again beneath the light. Soon the beast emerged from the fervid cloud of noises and aromas, pulled back the grille, lifted you out again. It set you down blinking in the darkness of your new enclosure. Iron bars sounded their low sonorous hum as the door closed, snapped, locked into place.

Weeks passed, turned into a month, turned into two weeks more. (For you, it was a decade.)

You passed your days and nights dozing in your bare room, enveloped in a fog of loneliness and boredom, punctuated occasionally by the awful clarity of mortal danger. Like your childhood, but without family, without friends, without anyone but yourself in whom to trust. There was no joy, no comfort; but even so you wanted to live, wanted it with every fibre of your being. You wanted to escape. You had no idea what was beyond this prison, but you wanted it still.

Every so often the beast came and deposited food into your enclosure, took away your refuse, cleaned off the spigot. Twice the smaller creature, the orange monster with the crenellated mouth, came back to torment you; but you screamed, and the beast came and took the creature away. Four times you were made to run aimlessly in search of shelter where there was none, awaiting your fate in a deep canyon of gleaming white stone, from which it was – you were quite certain of this – impossible to escape. But nothing ever happened. The beast would come after a while and scoop you up, deposit you back into your enclosure. It always smelled different upon your return. Six times more, you were made to go into the serpent's garden. Sometimes it advanced towards you; sometimes it did not. Once, only once, you found yourself caught between its body and the glass; but you struggled, scratched and kicked and bit, and vouchsafed your release thereby.

The day we met was a warm one, warmer than it had ever been since you left your home. Sunlight streamed into your enclosure, baking the soft ground, the discarded bits of food, buried waste. The ammoniac scent of your urine evaporated into the air, clinging to particles of dust, clinging for dear life, hoping blindly for an exit, for a release into the wilds beyond the room that enclosed your enclosure, some even more vast unknown beyond your awful private one. Conveying a message into the void: Deliver Me.

Outside, I stood bathing myself in the sun, breathing the warm air of late spring. I didn't even know that I was free. Your life, your captivity, your fear, all hidden from me, hidden in the corner of my friend's sun porch, halfway covered beneath a burlap sack. Did you smell me when I walked past? Could you hear my voice, distinguish it from that of your captor's? Did my footfalls resound lighter, friendlier, more aware of your fragility, your loneliness?

I stood by the car, loading up my pack, when my friend your captor called out to me. Something about liberating Iraq. A joke, perhaps, that I didn't get; he had a funny sense of humor, said such things often. Then he emerged from the sun porch, bare arms hugging the base of your cage.

Liberate a rat, he said again. Ophelia didn't want him. Not appetizing enough, I guess.

Liberate where, I asked. How.

He pointed to a stand of trees at the end of the alleyway.

Wait a minute, I shook my head, wait a minute.

Back in the sunporch, we opened your cage, and for the first time I saw you. You huddled under your spigot, blinking and shivering, whiskers twitching. You flinched every time I voiced a consonant. I reached in, grabbed for you, grabbed again; with both hands, finally, I drew you out. You raced up my shirtfront and clung to my skin. In the space between the fold of my collar and the back of my neck I could feel you breathing. We sat together for ten minutes (for me, it was an eyeblink) while I called Amelia. You and I fed on each other's excitement; your breathlessness was mine; my pounding heart a faroff echo of your own. I spoke into the phone, asking. But I was really asking you:

Can we.

Can we please.

And the answer, calling back out of the void:

We must.

Yes.

Lightly I plucked you from your hiding place. You permitted me to stroke your back. You ran back again to your corner: your whole world until then, crammed into that space beneath the spigot. And then I went backpacking, thirty-five miles in the wilderness. It was Amelia who came and picked you up. It was with her, not me, that you spent your first night in our home. Your home.

Where did your mind go for all of those weeks and weeks alone? Where, too, your soul? (Let no one say you don't have one.)

Do you understand the difference between cruelty and misfortune? Or is it all the same to you?

Do you live with it still, the memory of your fear? Have I buried it deep enough that you can only find it, now, in your dreams? (I see you awaken, sometimes, with a start.)

Did you know, before you found me, what it was to have a friend?

Did you know that you'd inherit the Earth?

At Arms End

By D.R. Amromin

Like oil painting,
A timeline canvas of me
Smudge mark histories on every
Window and mirror,
Every touch screen,
Keypad, elevator button.
Escalator, moving sidewalk,
Stairwell scurry.

Impressions left
On forgettable moments like
The pink bicycle handlebars
After my father let go.
Hanging, swaying
Blistering, bleeding
Swinging from the metal monkey bars.

Ever-so-slight crinkles
On the corners of diplomas.
On lease agreements
And parking tickets.
On Happy Birthday cards
And how-would-you-like-your-eggs guest checks.

Finger-painting scalps
And backs of lovers.
Answering questions of the tide,
And skipping rocks
In my shallow puddles.
Reading the topography
Of my landscape,
And writing loathsome,
Narrow-minded reviews.

Palms flat on every stage
I've ever worked
And on every stage
That's ever worked me.
On your cheek
Landed in agony
With a wallop.

Coiled around my pillow,
Between my two knees
Soaking in the heat.
Remembering how you'd
Run your fingertips
Over my brows
And worship my
Eccentricity.

Dusty Corners

By D.R. Amromin

Evicting myself
With calculated warning
In a timely manner,
Soaking wet.

The front door vomits
Into trash bags and cardboard boxes.
Belly tight, pushing, shaken.
The walls grow tall
And empty.

Each time returning
To finish the job,
Rounding endless corners
To discover another pile
Of ruin.

Death hangs on the wall
And butterfly kisses
The help.

Shadow / Box

By *D.R. Amromin*

The slack haze of the morning leans lazy on my window,

Hoping I'll wake. I've been up all night,
I do, but not to her credit. Counting wool sweaters.

My eyes creak open: blink.
Shutter click click clicks, snapping dreams – My eyes never close.
Light leaks on the negative. A latent image,
I wait for your feet to hit the floor.

I rise from my beechwood swamp cocoon,
Rinse the mud from my eyes, I ache for sunlight,
And finger paint the day. It casts me real.
It rides me raw.

I take the passive way too often.
Bare a grin and nod away, I swim the sidewalk,
I float to where I'm going. I never apologize
When I fondle an unsuspecting beauty.

I imagine your arms around me,
Gangly and strong, I climb you like a beanstalk,
My imagination holds you tighter than you'll ever know. I'm Jack without the magic –

Stretch. Stretch.

A brisk walk and a bus ride,
Keys in the front door ignition, If I had lungs to fill, I'd scream.
She barely turns. If I had legs to kick, I'd dance.
If I had fists to ball, I'd box.

Just tired enough to stay in.
Read a little, There's no umbilical cord,
Eat a little, Because if there was, I would have cut it.
Sleep a lot. They say you can't choose your family,
But the thing is, I have no blood
To share.

...And Nat King Cole Sang Smile on the Radio

For B.E.

By D.R. Amromin

The bedspring,
The floorboard,
The cupboard,
The lips,
The knees.
I lean, the table clicks.
My backbones stretch my linen skin
Which tears so easily
Nowadays.

I used to be a drum.
I took a beating and made music.
Quick feet and a quicker tongue.
I'd get lost in the rhythm
Of the song and the women.

Now I get lost in the bathroom
That hasn't been cleaned in years
Since I can't bend down far enough
And expect to get up again.

I was strong as an ox.
Hell – I was stronger.
I could lift and dip
And sway my hips.
My shoes shined on the dance floors
Of every jazz club in town,
Of every late night diner,
Of every subway car,
Of every sweetheart's boudoir.

Now, every shirt is threadbare,
Every suit is moth-eaten,
Every shoe is a slipper,
Every pocket full of dust.

I built this house for life –
Not for prison death.
Not to bunk with ghosts.
Solitary confinement
When there are no friends left to visit,
And no women left to care.

The television set is a talkative lover,
But I'm tired of listening to her chatter.
She tells me what everyone is doing
On the outside.
While I sit in my chair.
While it hurts to move.

The memories are only fading,
As rigor mortis hovers.
I'm too dry to cry,
As I can barely remember how to load
The pistol.

Hunger

By Nick Schwarzenegger

I am hungry enough to sell hot soil to Satan out of desperation,
working the hustle and the grind to make dirt into quinoa,
a simple transubstantiation, artifice as light as a kite in a tornado,
I would collect the tears of the widowed rich and stash them in a freezer,
string them on a necklace and sell them the meaning of the passing.

I am able to move quickly because I'm empty,
the stomach starts to throw its own manual on the fire;
I know why ghosts punch windows and throw old people down stairs—
when you're one half of a parentheses you'll do anything to close it.

God forbid the hunger is escalated to virtue,
you might seesaw entire houses of cards placed like rows of headstones,
you'll draft up terms of disservice and yoke herds of orphans to shoe machines.

I am at that point where my feet are scolded on the lava drippings
from where satiety should anchor the soul like a bullet,
a heavy lead rock left in the gullet of the dead
to keep them in the marsh where they sleep fitful,

out there the wind whispers in rhyme, shackled as it is to the sounds of the fullness of vowels,
fullness that the hungry dead do not know.

Buddhism has no hungry dead, only reincarnation in a hungry ghost,
this shows a proficiency its founders had in self-ablution, self-denial,
this shows a torturer intrinsically in grasp of his craft,
psychological skin grafts still visible where the ego has healed over—
it is an anaesthetized and stitched dog.

I prefer Rumi, the mind is the little dog trying to get the soul to play,
the soul is a zero—not its counterpart value,
simply an empty roundness katamari-demacying its tabula rasa
all over the street and park and pre-k,
but I am hungry in this moment, a pack with no wolves, roving for to be real,
a Nile of possible souls and acts.

I would sell Satan his soil, yes, I would feed him igneous rock in the cool of hell,
give Brutus and co a moment's respite,
before I hustled off like a comet out to scrape away the fullness of space.

Arianna and Amaranth

By Sam Moss

It had taken a lot to get them where they were now. To acquire this sort of elegance. The gold wall fixtures, the furniture upholstered in crushed velvet, the Persian rugs. Not to mention the days spent in relative ease lounging around this beautiful home, reading glossy publications, drinking fine beverages, engaged in cultured and sparkling conversation.

Amaranth laughed deeply, richly, and with a restrained sophistication. Laughed and laughed profusely. Her sister's wit was unmatched. Arianna's exquisite nuance and subtlety constructing the set-up, the suspense inflated to a perfect meniscus then the hit of the scathing punch lines which are always tempered by a balm of kindness. So lofty was her humor that, many times, Amaranth felt she was the only person in the world who could fully understand these jokes though, truth be told, she had already forgotten at what exactly she was presently laughing.

Things had not always been so quiet. Amaranth thought back fondly and with excitement on Arianna's sudden ascent through the world of fine art. Saatchi and his horde of hangers-on snatching up her restrained minimalist canvases mere months after she graduated from art school. The galleries at home and abroad clamoring to land those pieces that remained unsold. Not to mention Amaranth's own status as a highly sought after socialite (which, even thinking about this still, after these few quiet years, created little shivers of contentment within her).

Ibiza, too, had been such a fine time. The beaches, the music, the people. The people!

"Wasn't Ibiza just the pinnacle, Arianna?"

"Oh absolutely, absolutely." Arianna, distracted. "What made you think of Ibiza?"

"Well, of course, it's on my mind, we've only just returned."

"Just returned? Amaranth dear, it's surely been almost a year since we went to Ibiza. At least."

Amaranth paused and thought. Thought hard.

"Oh. Oh so it was."

Amaranth sipped from her tea, the fine bone china clinking ever so gently against her glistening front teeth, which had been set flat straight by years of top notch orthodontics. It was the little tap to her tooth that reminded her. She turned to the kitchen where her sister sat.

“We’re going to need to visit Perry soon.”

A few moments later Arianna said, “Right-o, I can take care of that later.” It was a lovely evening. Quiet and domestic. Just Amaranth and her sister sharing this place. The air smelled fine, as if perfumed by an exotic scented candle. Myrrh maybe? Arianna was always lighting these things, keeping the house fresh.

Amaranth felt parched. Tea sounded nice. She stepped into the kitchen, her lovely cotton sundress following just behind her body which had, through a rigorous exercise regime and thoughtful time spent in the summer sun, been slimmed and tanned to near perfection.

“It gets so dark in here, Arianna, I wish we could open these windows up just a little bit more.”

“Well I would, my dear, but I’m just so tired of passersby looking in at us. I feel so like a zoo animal sometimes. You know how it upsets me.” Amaranth looked at her sister, scanned those sharp cheekbones and eyes of azure that popped from her face.

Amaranth pulled the window’s heavy curtain a part of an inch to the side, a complex and pleasing floral pattern inscribed upon it. Sunlight struck her hand with the force of a hammer. She pulled away and let the curtain fall. Maybe the clocks were off again?

Amaranth poured the old water out of the kettle and refilled it under the minimal all-metal tap. Amaranth glanced at her sister. Arianna preferred reading the large, sophisticated art monthlies, reading criticism in *Artforum* – then, when she bored of this, switching to the gossip columns in *Flash Art*. She had this endearing habit of opening to the full page photos displaying intricate installation pieces and taking them in for thirty, forty-five, sixty minutes at a time without so much as blinking. Barely breathing even. Amaranth found Arianna’s concentration absolutely admirable.

There was only one kind of tea left in the pantry, a Sri Lankan Jasmine. Not Amaranth’s favorite but good enough. The bag’s cotton slid against the side of the cup.

With so few people around a place this large could seem so empty sometimes. It’s a shame. So much opulence wasted, so much glamor going unappreciated. The dozens of canvases which they had spent sleepless nights painting and repainting, abstract motifs which hung on every empty space and lay stacked in the corners, covered by appropriated bed sheets to keep damaging dust at bay. The doors even which Amaranth had one day painstakingly removed and painted different colors in order to add flair and elegance to the home.

“Arianna dear, we should have people over more often,” Amaranth looked down into her tea. “I said we should have people over more, Arianna dear. We should have

parties here, don't you think?"

Arianna looked up.

"I suppose." She could be moody sometimes, certainly a characteristic she received from Mama.

"Don't you think it would be nice?" Amaranth watched Arianna ignore her. The tea tasted a bit thin. Amaranth disdained the cloying syrup of honey. Yet there must be some way to fill it up and give the tea some body. She returned to the kitchen and opened the drawer but found its contents sparse. An individually wrapped packet of salt lay in the back. It seemed to make enough sense, the salt. She ripped it open and poured the grains out into her hand.

All of it went in, the whole handful. Turbid at first then dissolving to nothing in the hot cup. She took a sip and it tasted good. Full bodied like a grand cru. Amaranth approached the table and sat across from Arianna. She was still held by a picture of a huge collection of standing rusted pipes interlaced strung around with wire. The picture had been shot from a low and oblique angle giving the piece a geologic and menacing feeling.

"Arianna dear, what's the matter?"

Arianna looked up. There were the beginnings of tears in her eyes.

"We'll...we'll need to visit Perry very soon." Amaranth's face brightened at this.

"Yes! Yes indeed. Lovely! We'll have to do that very soon. Let me go change into my going-out clothes, my evening clothes, and we'll be all set."

Amaranth quickly stepped out of the kitchen through the living room and up the stairs. Things were looking a little dusty. Perhaps she could clean soon, polish the banister, scrub the walls, return this place to its glory which, she would be the first to admit, had faded slightly since its peak. But she wouldn't clean today, not now. Later.

Amaranth's room had always been a bit of a kaleidoscope. Stacked levels of gleaming wood surfaces and small embroidered things. Bits of creamy porcelain and lovely deep copper objects. She basked in the sight of it for a moment then threw off her evening robe and pulled from her mahogany dresser a deep purple chiffon dress. Slipping it easily over her head, she glanced in the full-length mirror and felt a surge of confidence bounding up her thighs and spine and chest.

"A pinnacle, darling. An absolute pinnacle of taste and grace and power."

Back downstairs she found Arianna crouched by the wall a pair of great dark glasses obscuring those lovely blue eyes, fingering one of the canvases that sat stacked

against the wall.

The canvas showed one wide eggshell stroke, the brush's bristles evident at all points, atop a roughly tessellated field of snow and cream shapes dotted with ivory. Amaranth put her hand on Arianna's shoulder.

"A masterpiece, dear. Utter genius. Don't worry, the collectors will be snatching them up soon enough...soon enough."

Amaranth opened the door with a great gusting movement and shepherded her sister out into the awful, burning, stinking world. It was a five block walk to Perry's but even that little bit of time was difficult enough to spend immersed among the harrying action of the street and the rabble. The sun beat down upon them without clemency.

"Awful." Amaranth said. "I much prefer evenings, with their soft purple light and crepuscular quiet," Arianna nodded. Perhaps in response to her sister or perhaps this was just a dip of the head from exhaustion.

"They won't see you lovey, there's nothing to be worried about."

"God. I know they all just want to take my picture. All they ever want to do is take my goddamn picture then run it through a computer and mold and warp it and fucking...fold it in half, fold it into A MILLION PIECES!"

"Arianna, Arianna! Shh shh darling, quiet now. No need to yell. It will just make it worse." Arianna adjusted her glasses which had dislodged a bit from the bridge of her nose. Amaranth could see people around them staring. It was their beauty of course, the aristocratic blood which shined indelibly through their skin, which caused the masses to stare. Amaranth was sure of this. Arianna kept her head low.

Around one final corner they arrived at Perry's building. Stepping into the entryway the pressure of the light and looks alleviated in a most agreeable way. A semblance of peace returned to the two. Amaranth could never remember which button it was that called up to his loft and it did not help that Perry kept his name off the plate for security reasons. She pressed one button and a garbled hello? came out. She pressed another. Then another and another in quick succession, which produced a torrent of clicks and voices falling out of the meager speaker.

"Perry, Per-ry! We're here," She smiled straining. Again and again, pushing and pushing. Little bursts of pushing then listening, pushing then waiting, acting then waiting. In one of these bursts Perry's familiar voice, a low lilting lisp, cut short on both sides by the intercom's copper cables finally came through. The door's lock clicked open and the two women stepped inside.

The foyer steeped in modesty as far as Amaranth was concerned. Not a place she would call home but then Perry was a little different. Lived his own life the way he liked. They climbed the four flights to his door and knocked together with great gusto. He took his sweet time, opened the door hesitantly, watching with his lazy grey eyes.

“Oh my darlings!” Perry, thin, tall, and curly haired, robed in a many-colored kimono, rushed out of the door and toward the women with opened arms. They hugged and exchanged bisous, very, very tastefully. “Come, come! Sit, sit!” He led them into a wide round room where a number of similarly thin and atrociously attractive people sat on couches in a circle around a large glass table. “We were just discussing this new game I’m inventing.”

The women sat.

“Tell.” Amaranth said,

“It’s something I’ve just come up with. Okay listen: I’m sure you’ve seen the little latter day missionaries walking around recently? Those lovely little boys in their suits, so jaunty and naïve? Well we’re calling the game Mormon Roulette. It goes like this. We get some rent boys, a couple. Young ones you know? Those ones down on a-hundred and twenty-second street, the thin ones who are up for anything? We take them and dress them up just like a pair of those sweet little urban conquistadors, with the suits and bikes and backpacks and everything. Then someone briefs them a little on general etiquette et-cet-era. We then send them out into the streets just like the real thing. Now, integral to the game is that yours truly never sees them and they never see me. Well then we wait, have a nice little time and wait for them to show up. Now here’s where things get fun. The first group of missionaries to ring my bell gets swept in, taken up and had! Real or fake, we take them to my room and give them what for. You see we tell our boys to struggle regardless, to give a little fight, so even if it is them we never know. Oh my, it will be a game alright!” They laughed.

“And if it isn’t your own boys? If it’s the others? The real missionaries?” Perry looked at Amaranth very seriously.

“Well we’ve never really kept track of consequences before have we?”

Perry laughed then suddenly got very serious.

“Anyways how are both of my glamorous little kittens doing?”

Amaranth looked over at Arianna who has crumpled up into herself on the couch.

“Well, we need your help, I think. Things are seeming so un-lovely to us these days.”

“Very unpleasing aesthetically. The w-w-w-world.” Arianna stuttered out.

“Ah-hmm. Yes, yes of course.” Perry stood and headed for another room. “I know just what you need.”

On a couch opposite these sisters of agony sat, entwined around each other’s limbs, an angular east African woman and a slightly overweight man in a sequined outfit. They peeked at the sisters out of the corners of their eyes then returned to each other, taking up a conversation which had apparently been broken by their entrance.

“Soooo then I filled up the reservoirs of the palm tree, the little areas where the water can flow in.”

“Yes, yes, yes I know.” The man cut in over her in exasperation.

“The hoses that connect you know?”

“Yes, yes, yes! I know.”

“Where the liquid enters, that’s where I poured it. You know?”

“Yes, yes! I know” He seemed frustrated or excited, switching between the two very quickly. “And then? Then what?”

“Well then the palm’s reservoir was full. Obviously.” Their gazes parted.

They lapsed suddenly into silence.

The conversation registered very distantly for the two sisters and its bizarre tone only provided the very inklings of disturbed confusion.

Perry sashayed into the room.

“You prefer the Pambrin, right?”

“Um...yes.”

Arianna began to shake slightly like a very small dog.

“I’m so very sorry, my darlings, but I seem to be all out at this point. Hmm yes all out of it. Not sure when I’ll be able to get more either, it is really quite the delicacy. Quite difficult to come by, you know? Ex-specially around this time of year. Anyways if I could supply you with anything else? Mexican Drear? A satchel of benifitoxin? Perhaps some Garun?”

“FUCK Perry! You know we don’t fuck around with your street shit!” Arianna wiped a thread of spit from her mouth. “Let’s fucking get out of here.”

Arianna stood, pulling Amaranth up by the hand, and burrowed head first and slightly hunched out of the room. Amaranth, shocked but moving along with the indomitable force of her sister, turned at the last moment.

“Oh dear Perry, so sorry! Hope to see you again soon!”

The sun seemed to have gotten even brighter and angrier during their time inside. Amaranth could not help but shield her eyes from the photic onslaught.

“Fucking piece of shit! Fucking asshole! Fucking withholding from us like that. God. DAMMIT!”

Amaranth looked down at her dress. For the first time she noticed a small tear at the hem, a little unraveling, nothing more. A stain too. Small, slight, but potentially noticeable by others.

“I’ll need to wash this when we get home.”

“The sheen is still oaken.”

“Beg pardon, dear?”

“I said the fucking machine is still broken! Do you ever listen? Do you remember anything?” Amaranth looked over in surprise.

“I’m sorry dear, I suppose I’d forgotten.”

“Yeah! It’s been broken since you put that pillowcase full of bricks in it a month ago.”

“I’d never do something like that.” Amaranth laughed quietly. Loudly. The few people on the street looked over at her.

They stepped through the front of the door in a clutter.

“Uh god this place is in utter shambles. When did this happen? How did this happen?”

Adorning the walls in patches around the broken light fixtures were great messy splotches of gold spray paint. There was a large faux wood table in the middle of the living room, dozens of mugs atop it. Each mug was half full of liquid saturated and bittered by forgotten tea bags. In the center of the clutter was a messy notebook. Piles of partially torn trashy teen magazines sat in the corners. A sofa chair sat overturned.

“Arianna, have we been robbed? Who would, who would do this to us?”

“God fucking shut up.” Arianna stomped up the stairs and slammed the door to her room.

“Well it doesn’t look like they have taken your art dear.”

Amaranth squatted down before a stack of canvases which lay propped against a wall. She pulled off a soiled sheet which covered them. The first few in the row were unpainted. She flipped past these but upon reaching the end found the whole stack to be blank. She scooted over to another row nearby. This too she found to be completely blank all the way through.

Against every wall they leaned. Row after row, stack after stack, canvases from the size of a palm to three or four feet on a side. Each one untouched, pure and without a single mark upon it.

Contributing Author Biographies

D.R. Amromin recently chose to make Seattle her home for its vital, thriving, exciting theatre and arts culture. Being a theatre artist, the transition to a new city with few contacts inspired Dana to also pursue a solo endeavor to keep her busy and productive. The logical and natural choice seemed to be writing. By some lucky twist of fate, she crossed paths with Old Grown Northwest, where she has been enjoying a new adventure in this literary community. In her life before Seattle, Dana obtained an AA Degree in Theatre Arts from Los Angeles Pierce College, then continued on to work as a stage manager, performer, and award-winning director. She then earned a Diploma in Baking and Pastry Arts from Le Cordon Bleu, Los Angeles, and has been savoring a career in the world of sweets ever since! Dana most recently appeared with Seattle's Blood Ensemble in their 30 Hours project.

Ian Greenfield is a polyglot medievalist and alternate-history scholar who eats peanut butter straight out of the jar. He was born in Tacoma and grew up there, and he still sleeps best by the water. He has gone into debt to feed an ineluctable academic habit. So far, this has led to degrees in creative writing and classical languages from the University of Puget Sound. He currently lives in Seattle, works for Google, and comes home at night to write fantasy, remixed medieval romances, and horror. He has achieved a state of productive discontent as a poet. Old houses and old-growth forests provide sustainable fuel for his imagination. He feels these details are a more lucid biography than a narration of sequential events, and is sure you'll understand.

Alexander Haddad is the founder and Executive Director of Old Growth Northwest. He lives in Seattle with his girlfriend Amelia and their four pet rats, of whom one is the subject of the story included in this collection.

Brian E. Langston is a fictionalist, poet, musician, and part-time jangleer. Originally hailing from California, he arrived in the Pacific Northwest via a circuitous route that involved an 8-year stay in Baltimore, MD, and a 5-month trek through South America. He has organized many poetry and art events, with a focus on multimedia/cross-genre performances that incorporate music, poetry, movement, and the visual arts. While in Charm City, he hosted a roundtable discussion on the female Beat poets for the Baltimore Book Festival, organized a 50th anniversary celebration of the publication of *Howl* (including a performance of the poem arranged for multiple voices and accompaniment), and held stints as assistant editor for the journal *Poems Against War* and guest editor for the broadside *Poets' Ink*. His work has appeared in *Attic*, *Octopus Dreams*, *Gargoyle*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Loch Raven Review*, *JMWW*, and other places, both in print and online. His self-published chapbook *The Ruined City* appeared in 2008. Previously, in Santa Barbara, California, he founded the poetry journal *Into the Teeth of the Wind*. You can visit him online at <http://www.mayhemonward.com>.

Sam Moss lives in the Pacific Northwest. He is currently working on a novel called *Basic Analysis*. He is a writer at NADA (nadadamagazine.blogspot.com) and blogs at perfidiousscript.blogspot.com.

Nick Schwarzenberger wades into vast fields bare-chested and holding a machete. There he daringly dances with the hyperbole trees and harvests their razor-edged leaves, from which he sews, using naught but a single cactus needle and his hair clippings from the year preceding, his artist bios. When he is not on a diet of hot air, he lives in Seattle and spends his time hiking, writing, assiduously studying and analyzing hip hop, religiously watching science documentaries, and drawing with sharpies. He also travels, eats weird food, and works a day job. He enjoys the occasional cocktail, poetry that is not boring, and meeting new people. He performs sporadically at different venues in Seattle, and you can find his scraps of writing and clips of performances at pleomorph.tumblr.com.

Matthew Spencer is a fiction writer, music journalist and translator who dislikes cutesy literary bios. Just the facts, please. Born in Western Colorado, he has lived in the Pacific Northwest since the late 90s. In the 2000s, he played in a string of obscure electronic and rock groups as part of the DIY experimental music scene in Portland, Oregon. Later he studied History and the German language at the University of Washington, with a focus on the literature and culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Beginning in October 2013, he will be working in Bad Ischl, Austria as part of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship program.

Special thanks to:

D.R. Amromin
Chester Bennett
Cynthia Castle
Ian Greenfield
Alexander Haddad
Brian E. Langston
Sam Moss
Alex Osuch
Nick Schwarzenberger
Matthew Spencer

Old Growth Northwest is a Seattle-based arts nonprofit serving a diverse community of writers and readers in the the Pacific Northwest. For more information, please visit www.oldgrowthnw.org.

