



Sten•o
Volume III
An Anthology

From the Writer's Workshops at Old Growth Northwest

General Editor

Erin Fried

Contributing Editors

Allison Cloud

Ian Greenfield

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Cover Art by Shannon Marie Chavez

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Sten o volume III.

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Old Growth Northwest

Old Growth Northwest is a literary nonprofit dedicated to fostering a diverse community of support for writers and readers in the Pacific Northwest. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Seattle, Old Growth serves the greater Pacific Northwest region, including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, and Alaska.

This volume is a collection of work by people who have participated in the The Writer's Workshops at Old Growth Northwest from June 2014 to June 2105. The program remains low-cost and welcoming to any who care to join. Only workshop participants are eligible to submit to Sten•o

In addition to the Writer's Workshops, Old Growth offers a variety of programs for free or at a low cost to the public:

- **Gay Romance Northwest Meet-Up:** the only LGBTQ romance fiction conference in the region
- **Reading & Open Mic:** free bi-monthly reading series
- **Poplorish:** a literary magazine for new voices in the PNW
- **Voices Beyond Bars:** creative writing classes for prisoners in Washington State

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

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Introduction

In June 2013, Old Growth began hosting a series of Writer's Workshops at various coffee shops throughout Seattle. Offered for free or at a low cost, these workshops empower local writers as facilitators and embody a set of core values:

- **Public ownership.** Writers own their work, take responsibility for the things they say, and invest in the revision process.
- **Collaborative learning.** Encouraging participants to collaborate and share their work outside of the workshop fosters connections that may offer resources beyond the scope of the program.
- **Respect.** Participants and facilitators alike should strive to create an atmosphere of openness where cultural competency and gender mainstreaming are prioritized.
- **Trust and Confidentiality.** Participants make a commitment to each other to show up, building trust within the group. What is said in the group stays in the group.
- **Inclusivity.** Everyone has the ability to write, and everyone has a story to tell. If you can communicate (in any fashion), you can create writing that is deep, important, and of artistic merit.

As this program has grown from one workshop two summers ago to thirty since its inception, it remains our goal to reach out actively toward marginalized or underrepresented voices. We look forward to expanding its reach through collaboration and through the promotion of this volume. We hope you'll be there with us.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Shannon Marie Chavez for her original cover art and to contributing editors Allison Cloud, Ian Greenfield, and Benjamin Schmitt for curating this volume

Best Regards,

Erin Fried
General Editor

Blackbird

By Michele Graaff

What stories are in me,
the children I'll never have.

Germes of things
with hearts and limbs.

Kicking feet against spine,
pressing beats into my gut. They are

some other kind of truth
borne of the world's quiet couplings.

Here is one
about the dead

blackbird caught in the fence.
How I stood beside a hayfield

with a twig in the sun, poking
a matchstick leg, jewel eyes

closed, wings tight against
his shiny body. Tiny talons stuck

fast, too long caught there
in barbed wire, wind-twisted.

He clung, head toward earth.
How I needed to bury him.

Beyond, a tractor droned
on along golden rows.

Joy Ride

By MB Austin

We're already in our nightshirts, Maji on the top bunk and me on mine, when she sits up and swears under her breath. The bunk squeaks some more, and she plunks to the ground. "I have to go back," she whispers, pulling on shorts in the dim light that filters through the curtains from the streetlight.

"What? No! Why?" I'm putting my feet on the floor, scanning for some pants in the piles there.

"Go to sleep, Bubbles. I just left my tape in the player. I'll be back in twenty."

By the time I find some shorts, she's down the stairs and creeping through the kitchen. If I try to catch up, I'll make too much noise. Dammit!

I lie back down and close my eyes, but it's no good. I flop one way, then the other. Tonight will be the night she gets caught, I just know it. Out there alone. I start to feel the panic rise, and now I'm afraid I'll start screaming any minute, and Hannah and Ava will run down the hall from their room, and Maji will get busted by them, when she comes sneaking back in.

I take the calming breaths, and count, like Ava taught me, until the screaming feeling washes away. I have to put my brain someplace calm, so I go back through tonight, playing it back like a movie behind my eyelids. Dinner, then doing the dishes, me washing and Maji drying. Hannah asking what our plans for the evening are.

"Thought we'd go to the park," Maji lies. Well, not a lie, exactly. I know we'll go through the park, to give ourselves some distance before we starting scouting for a car to borrow.

"Well, keep your eyes open and—," Hannah starts.

"And your shoes laced," Maji finishes for her. "Yes, Sensei."

I would never interrupt Hannah like that. But then, Maji does a lot of things that never even occur to me to do. Plus, she's been training with Hannah for years now, and Hannah's her godmother. You'd never guess that at the dojo; but at home you can tell.

I still can't believe Hannah agreed to let us stay out until 11. And go out alone, in the dark. Back in May, when Maji got kicked out of school again and came to stay for the summer, we heard them talking about it. I wasn't trying to eavesdrop, but if you just sit quietly at the top of the stairs, you can hear everything in the living room.

"Bubbles needs to start getting out on her own, have some unstructured, unsupervised time," Ava said. "She's ready for more freedom."

Maji elbowed me.

"By running loose with the Wild Child?" Hannah replied. You could hear the skepticism in her voice, no need to see that look on her face.

I nudged Maji back.

“Maji will look out for her, and teach her some things about being a teenager,” Ava said.

“That’s what I’m afraid of.” And then Hannah said just one more word, “Havvah.”

I looked at Maji. She shrugged. She’s learned some Hebrew on her own, just listening to them and looking stuff up. She can even read a little, thanks to Friday night dinners. Maji can read and speak English, Spanish, and Farsi already. She’s learning Russian from some babushka in Little Odessa, too. Me, I barely read English. Maji punched the bed when she learned that, and said a bunch of curse words in Spanish. All I caught was “Deacon,” and he deserves whatever she said. Now that reading’s starting to click, I get why she was so pissed, and why Deacon wouldn’t let us. He was afraid of anything that gave us any power at all. Never in a million years would I have gone outside the compound on my own, day or night.

So the very next Friday night, Maji asked what ‘havvah’ means. Hannah and Ava looked at each other, and I knew we were busted for listening in. But Ava just crinkled her eyes, like she does when she’s trying not to smile, and said, “Mischief.”

Hannah’s kind of lectury; so she tagged on, “Wrong-doing. Petty theft, other crimes against property. Nothing as serious as assault, or homicide.” She paused. “So, girls, what else did you learn from our conversation? Which I am assuming you heard all of.”

Maji pushed the fish on her plate with her fork, then looked at them both.

“That you aren’t worried whether we can take care of ourselves.”

“True, you will look out for one another.” Hannah agreed. “Follow the five buddy rules. Which are?” She looked at me.

“Um, stay together. No drinking or drugs. No getting in cars with strangers. Stay alert to your surroundings? Uh...” I looked to Maji, stuck for number five.

“Be accountable to one another. One of us acts out, we’re both in trouble.”

Hannah nodded, satisfied. But Ava added, “And, of course, neither of you needs any attention from the county sheriff.”

All I could say to that was, “Yeah.” Cause truer words were never spoken. I needed to keep flying under the radar, out here in quiet little suburban Long Island. After the FBI went after Deacon, they wanted to put me in WitSec, send me to strangers someplace far from NYC and from “home,” both. But Hannah pulled some strings, and the Feds gave me a choice.

When I chose to stay, Ava promised I could start a new life here, go to school with normal kids. OK, she said, “average,” but I know what she meant. And Maji? She could totally take juvvie, she’s the original badass. But that could take years; and it’s bad enough she’s going back to Brooklyn when school starts. I wish she could stay out here with me; but some people have

real parents who actually want them. And she's going to that Queer school, where they'll let her independent study stuff. The rate she's going, she'll know like a dozen languages before we graduate. And I'll be lucky if I have a diploma. Seriously. Really fucking lucky. I'm not going to let my temper, or my panic attacks, or even all the school I've missed out on get in my way. When I think what Deacon would say about girls going to school, much less there being a Queer school for girls like Maji, I don't know whether to laugh or break something. These days I do a lot of both, making up for lost time.

Turns out I love being outside at night, feeling like we can go anywhere, and do anything. But tonight we just kept walking, never picking a car. Sitting in the swings at the park, watching the sun set over the cove was nice and all; but I've been looking forward to taking a ride since Maji brought it up this morning.

The more cars we pass up, the more time I have to think about havvah, the sheriff, and the look on Ava's face if I got in trouble.

"At this rate, we might as well walk home," I say, "No matter what car I like, you got some reason it we can't take it."

Maji just shrugs. She never apologizes for her rules, and she never backs down from them, either. You don't want to follow them? Fine; see ya later. Brat. She's so much like Hannah, you'd think she could see that. But noooo.

I see the Andersen's spare car in front of their house, and start for it. "Hey! We can take this one again."

"Bubbles - no!"

But Maji's too late – my hand's already on the door handle, lifting up. And there's the alarm, bouncing around the sleepy, tree-lined street. Crap.

Without even looking at each other, we dash across the street and hunker down behind a minivan. I close my eyes, waiting for sirens. But instead, the alarm stops. We peek through the minivan windows to the dark houses across the street. No lights going on, nobody stepping out onto a porch. I breathe again.

Almost broke Rule #1 – **Don't Get Caught**.

"So that's another reason for rule two, huh?" I can feel myself blush. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

Maji grabs my hand and peels my fingers out of their fist, before the nails can cut my palm. "S'ok, Bubbles. No harm, no foul."

The Anderson's car was the first we ever took for a spin, back in May; and it didn't go berserk like that then. Maji picked it specially because it met Rule #2: **Must be unlocked, with keys in it, or hide-a-key handy**.

"So, stealing a car is OK, but breaking into it is not?" I said to that one. "You just don't know how. I bet you never hot-wired a car in your life."

Maji gave me her 'I am not amused' look. "If that's what I *wanted* to do, a late '80's Civic like this would be perfect," she said, opening the driver's door.

“Hondas and Toyotas, any econo model, pre-’90, are the top most stolen cars in the US. The last three years, they changed the security, but the 80’s are still OK. If I had a Slim Jim —” She paused, waited to see if I knew what she meant. I didn’t, but I’m not dumb. Some kind of break-in tool, right? So I nodded.

“OK, I’d slide it right down here, between the window and door panel, mira?”

I saw. I nodded.

“So, now we’re inside, under 10 seconds. Get in.”

I opened the always-unlocked door and slid in behind the wheel, while Maji got in the passenger side. “Where the key goes in — there — you find the gap under that. Go ahead, feel it.” She waited until I did, then went on, patient like I might actually need to know how someday. “So you just stick a screwdriver in there, the flat kind, and pry it open. Cracks the plastic, but now you can pull the wires out, touch the right two, and vroom! Less than 30 seconds, if you practice.”

“Well, that’s easier than stalking your neighbors, figuring out who keeps their keys up for grabs. Why don’t we just do that?”

“Cause joy-riding gets you community service, or a scolding. Breaking shit can send you to juvvie. Tambien, Chica, not everybody’s got the cash or the time to get their car fixed.”

Bingo. She pretends it’s about juvvie, but really it’s about not hurting somebody by mistake. I won’t call her on that, though. She’ll never admit it, just get moody on me. Brat.

So that night we took the key from under the mat, where half the people in Oyster Cove keep them, and drove the Civic to get ice cream down by the marina. Well, Maji drove and I rode, like always. We left the AC off, and rolled down the windows. I love to feel the wind in my face, the horrible daytime stickiness gone after dark. Maji says I’m like a golden retriever, shiny blond hair blowing in the wind, nose in the air, grinning. I never had a dog before; but now I notice them all the time, cruising by in town, noses poked out of back windows. They look really blissed out, the original joy-riders.

“Maybe the first car thief was poor, and just wanted to make his dog happy,” I suggested.

Maji laughed, a thing that totally softens her face. “Maybe.”

Now I think, maybe the Andersons realized somebody’s been borrowing their car, and started locking it up. Which makes me feel bad. Maji shrugs that idea off, though. “Nah, their son’s home again from college. A few months in the City, and he’s probably driving them crazy locking everything all the time.”

“So how ‘bout this one?” I ask, tapping the Aerostar we’ve been hiding behind.

If we grab a car and go right now, we can still follow Rule #3: **Always**

bring the car back where you got it. Before they know it's gone. Another serious pain in the butt, that one; but Maji knows half the people in this town, and things like where they work and when they come home. I thought she'd have some kinda notebook; but she keeps a million details in her head. If she did anything bad with all those bits and pieces, like gossiping or blackmailing, or acting stalkery, it would be wicked creepy.

But then that would break some other Maji rule, wouldn't it? So I guess it's just part of her weirdness. And also how I know she won't tell anyone else the stuff I tell her, not even Hannah or Ava, or her own Papi. Mr. Rios might be the kindest man I ever met, but still. I need to be able to look people in the eye, and not wonder what they're thinking about me, you know?

She still hasn't answered me about the Aerostar. It looks perfect to me - boring, dusty. Old enough to have a cassette player. Not a cop magnet, for sure.

I cross my arms, ready to give up and go home. "So what's wrong with this one, Maji-san?"

"Look in the back seat."

I try to see in, but even the street lights aren't enough. "Gimme the flashlight."

She hands it to me, and I shine the pale beam into the back. So close we both jump, a siren wails. We hit the ground in a blink, nearly landing on each other. I start laughing, hiding in the damp grass, sheltered by a minivan. The patrol car flies by, reds and blues flashing, the wail getting softer as quickly as it had grown piercing, just a few seconds before.

"Jesus, Bubs," Maji exhales. "You are such a brat."

"Am not," I say, still laughing, pushing myself off the ground. "You are."

"Am not." Already on her feet, she bumps me with her hip.

I bump her back. "Are too. That cop had grilled us, you'd have been all, 'Occifer! Help! We drove off without the baby, and now we'll never get to babysit again!'"

She laughs finally, and shakes her head. "Loca. You did see the car seats, then?"

"Yeah. So. Little kids go to bed early, right? Parents have to stay home and watch them, right? We could borrow it for an hour, still be home in time."

Maji sighs. "Here's the thing. I was gonna start teaching you to drive, since I won't be here soon, 'cept some weekends. And this one's no good for that. The owner's a single mom, can't even afford the car wash, much less body work, you know, if."

I'm kind of stunned, can't even think of a comeback, for once.

"Hey, maybe tomorrow night," she offers. "Grab that douchebag Carpenter's Beemer, go up to the campus parking lot. He's so rich, we could total his ride, he'd just order a new one."

"Um, Maj?" I'm still swimming, looking for words. "I don't want to drive, yet. I just wanna ride around with you."

“But, what if you need to get away, and you don’t know how?”

“Chica, I won’t need to get away. I’m safe here.” When I say it out loud, it feels real. Not like when Ava said it to me, letting me try out the idea. “I can wait two years and get my license like the normal kids. Right now, I just want to be a kid.”

I didn’t mean to cry, but sometimes it just hits me like that. At least now I can, you know? Maji puts an arm around me, and we lean against the minivan. When we stand up straight again, our shorts are dusty.

“Hey,” I say. “Why don’t we wash it for her?”

Maji shakes her head. “Car wash is too public. Also, it closed at nine.” She might be the only 14 year old in New York who tracks details like that. How is her brain not full, already?

“What about out at the Fairchild place?” A lot of the old Gold Coast estates, that used to be owned by obscenely rich people who went bankrupt, are being restored by non-profits now. The volunteers go home at night.

The brat smiles that smile that creeps over her face, like she can’t help it. “They have water, and enough light. Cops don’t make a sweep ’til after midnight.”

I want to ask how she knows that last bit, but hold my tongue. Finally, a yes!

Maji pulls the little van away from the curb carefully, and hands me tonight’s soundtrack. Not an actual movie soundtrack, like Star Wars, but ours. Well, Maji’s, anyway. I’m still figuring out what I like. There’s so much! All they played at the squat in Brooklyn was Zeppelin and AC/DC, and that just made my head hurt. Maji laughed when I called it noise, said I sounded old and crotchety like Hannah. Who’s what? 45, maybe.

Surprise, surprise, tonight we have Ani diFranco. She’s cool, really. Kind of angry in a good way. That about sums up Maji’s taste in music, except for the Latin stuff. Now, that stuff is fun. Maybe it’ll be part of my soundtrack, when I can follow the words better.

The drive out takes less than one side of the tape, and Maji turns the van off in the middle of Lullaby of South Brooklyn, which will go on my soundtrack for sure.

Washing a car in the dark, with a hose and just a baby bib we found in the back seat, is a little, well, imprecise. The hose won’t reach to the floodlight by the grand entrance, so we have to drive back and forth, washing and then checking our work. After the second go at it, we’re both antsy about curfew, and a lot damper than we’d meant to get. So we give it one last hose-down, and drive back to town.

Maji goes exactly the speed limit, stops at every sign, and pulls the van back into its spot exactly like it was before. As she puts the keys away under the floor mat, I look down the driveway of the closest house, and what do they have? I start giggling, pointing, until Maji comes around the front of the mostly-clean Aerostar, shushing me. She sees the hose I’m pointing at, and

it's all over. We start jogging home, our sneakers squelching, laughing even though it makes our sides hurt.

Ava's in the kitchen when we come in, reading a book at the table, under the light that hangs down from the ceiling fan. She looks us over, and her eyebrows both lift. "Oh, my."

"Sprinklers at the park came on and got us," Maji lies smoothly.

"Well, get everything into the wash, please. The dirt got you, too."

Maji nods, and I smile. I love Ava. Hannah too, of course, but Ava most of all.

I open my eyes, stare at the bunk above me. The empty bunk. I shouldn't worry about her, though. Ava says a worry is just a prayer for trouble. She taught me the movie trick, to see what's already happened, and see what you think about it, good or bad, now that it's done and nothing more can happen to you there. But I want this movie to have a real ending, a happy one.

So I picture Maji jogging back, her easy stride, scanning the empty streets for trouble – people, dogs, cops. Nothing in her way. I see her get back into the Aerostar and then – no! There's a patrol car cruising down the street, shining its light right and left, and I nearly yell out loud for Maji to duck down. I see her flatten out on the seats, waiting; and I breathe again.

I rewind to when the wind was in my hair, the speakers singing me the Lullaby. I'd like to stay there; but we're on the buddy system and I need to get Maji home safe, somehow. So I decide that even if that cop spots her, she'll be cool. It's not illegal to be in an unlocked car, after all. Is it? I'll ask her when she gets back. Besides, I gave her that great line about babysitting. It could work...

And what if the cop in my head took Maji to the station? Hannah would go there and bring her home, that's all. She'd want the truth, and gives us extra chores, but that'd be ok. That'd be fine, actually. Maji would try to say it was all her, but I wouldn't let her. And Hannah and Ava would see that I am learning to Be Accountable.

I smile to myself. Tomorrow we should wash Hannah's car. And not tell her why.

Ena

By Emily Davis

She comes when the momentum of day has tucked into night
And the shine of the lamppost peeks through the slats in the shades.
It would be more correct to say that she is summoned
When the kelly-green comforter wraps me up alone
And the empty room is still loud.
She draws near; the maternal presence in the absence of an actual mother.
I inhale familiar scents—caraway, charcoal, cinnamon-sandalwood,
Like childhood memories
Forged on unofficial documents.

Red

By *Emily Davis*

I grew up wild and wanting.

This is my salvation.

My eyes were dizzy, either with fury or glee; in my fierce moments, they tend to blur together in a way that exhilarates me and puts my loved ones on edge.

Three years old, I received my first memorable wallop.

“You need to tan her little hide!” my Nana, gentle Nana, had advised Mother.

I hadn’t taken too kindly to the timeout I’d earned for scaling the shelves of our too-full pantry in search of the coveted butterscotch chocolate chips I’d spied in my mother’s shopping cart. My bare feet were meaty and rosy and planted firmly on the seat of my Nana’s antique rocking chair. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth I pumped the rocker with my sturdy legs. Energy welled in my chest. Adrenaline. Freedom. An unusually robust child, I filled a five-year-old’s pink and white pinstriped Oshkosh overalls, two years ahead of the game.

I flashed electric eyes, but my dad would say “Cornflower blue, like your Nana.” Old lady relatives, visiting from Cambridge or Dublin, arrived cramped and out of place in the sagebrush desert surrounding Yakima’s lazy beige airport. I drew into myself as they approached, embarrassed by the shabbiness of the linoleum floors, fluorescent lighting, and ripped seats. They would clutch my jutting chin as a handle, turn my head left, right, left, right, left, and muse over the chronology of my ancestry.

“Exotic eyes,” they’d say, “not from our side. She’s got some of the Indian in her, she does, from Rick’s mom” my Nana. I’d puff my chest out, proud of the attention, and of my difference. Back and forth, back and forth I pumped the chair on my strong legs, eyes wild, bursting out a hearty belly laugh.

I was a child of action. My flying pigtails were braided carefully by my father and tied with matching pink elastics. Every morning was a haggling match as Daddy would hoist me up onto the bathroom counter, whistling

“Home of the Range” or “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” and I would request a hopelessly tall order of braids for our 7am departure. With that strawberry blonde shock of hair and a thick dusting of freckles from running wild in the desert sun, I swung my weight right, left, right, left. The door to my newly decorated nursery, in the seafoam green of the early 90s, flies open. It has been too quiet for too long in time out, and my mother is too, too late. Her eyes freeze on me, disbelieving. The light energy in my chest shifts between the swell of rage and the throb of panic. Her

breath catches in her throat. There is a pause before wrath is unleashed, and swiftly.

My eyes grow hard-- glacial ice. I continue my belly laugh-- though it grows shrill and disregulated. I proceed to finish emptying the contents of Nana's red McCormick's food dye back and forth, back and forth in sharp, bright arcs across the length of the room.

For weeks after this last solo timeout, I was red like my tanned hide and red like the relatives who did not come over for tea—angry red, lonely red, ferocious red.

I remember sliding across my parents' new hardwood floors, right foot first in my coveted cotton fold-down lace socks that were popular to wear with shiny, black-strapped Mary Jane's at Summitview Elementary School. Skidding to a stop before the floor-to-ceiling windows-- wave windows we called them—because the weight of the glass slowly sunk towards the floor over time, like translucent funhouse mirrors that vibrated, threatening to shatter when Mother wasn't home and Daddy'd crank up Billy Idol loud enough for my eardrum to rattle along to Billy's wailing.

I skid to a stop and felt anxiety implode in my chest, a quick sinkhole that made my hands and feet fly and underarms prickle and sweat.

There below the dormant juniper bushes, down the wooden steps we'd whitewashed that summer, I spied my mother *the nurse* taking a long, slow drag on a cigarette. A relatively sheltered child at five—I lived on a dead-end street punctuated by an apple orchard, I'd never broken a bone, no one I knew had ever died, we read *The Bernstein Bears* before bed—smoking was just about the worst crime in my book. It went down next to robbing piggy banks with hammers, knocking over old ladies at church, and eating every last marshmallow out of a brand new box of Lucky Charms. Boy, could you get your hide tanned for any of those.

Panicked and determined, I considered dialing 9-1-1 on my delinquent mother. I yelled frantically towards my sister in her Fisher-Price jumper, just two years old, "What are we gonna do with you?!" I decided to cache her behind a blooming Christmas cactus that was beginning to consume the living room, a starter from Nana's mother plant, bursting into carmine star blossoms.

As Mother shuffled the snow off her lime green windbreaker, I lit into her, furious that she would jeopardize all of our lives and probably turn us all into criminals. She explained that I was sensitive. I was dramatic. I had a big imagination. The "cigarette" was really a thermometer and the "smoke" was warm breath in the winter air.

To this day I don't know what the "truth" was, but I do remember screaming shrilly, "Liar!" so forcefully that my voice strained and croaked

in my throat. It seemed to radiate straight from my vocal chords to my eardrums, hurting my own ears.

And just like that, in an image like a shutter frame surfaces in my mind, quick, with repetitions that bleed into one memory. My mother is big. My mother is terrifying. With her open palm she connects with my freckled Irish cheeks, the fear of god into a wayward sinner, the flush of her anger etched in the lifelines of her palms, mirrored by the scarlet penitence in my cheeks. Red hair, red nails, pursed red lips: fast, fast, fast, and red before my eyes—angry red, lonely red, ferocious red.

Our shared blood and shared rage rise to be seen in the pallor of our contact. Our contact is lost in life's lines, repeating the altercations of our ancestors, grandmother and daughter and granddaughter and granddaughter: god and tyrant.

Our eyes say, "I need you. I hate you. I need you to love me."

That same nursery had once sported the avocado shag carpeting of the late 70s.

We bought it that way, my mother'd written.

My eyes skipped back and forth, so eagerly devouring the letter before me that they had to return back and forth again to discern its meaning.

3,000 miles away from home, I'd realized that I did not know my mother. Apart from the fact that she liked the sinks polished, enjoyed red wine and shitty novels, and seafoam chocolates from seaside sweet shops, I couldn't piece together even the haziest collage of who she is. 3,000 miles away from home, deep in the bowels of my fortified, cinderblock dorm room, it seemed safe enough to ask about the story of her life.

I was pregnant with you. We signed the papers on Valentine's Day, 1988.

I'd hoped we might start a relationship, that a person, or at least a character might be carved out in our correspondence, travelling back and forth across the nation, a safe distance, a physical disconnection that might facilitate... *some* connection.

I pictured her eyes watery as she typed out her memories at my request. I could see her on the other side of the screen, struck with an emotion you'd assume was pride and warm reminiscence, an aging woman reentering the bustle and anticipation of a life still becoming.

I felt rejected by you since you were two years old.

But—the emotions of my mother's eyes always needed. I imagined those eyes the morning I'd moved out: I stand impatiently, shifting from foot to foot at the base of the scrolling bannister, beneath the fake Grecian frieze she'd bordered with imitation ivy. I wait for my ride to the airport. My suitcase, dubbed "Big Red" by my father, is packed near bursting, haggardly cocked to the side, out of place in this painstakingly decorated entry way,

with one wheel missing and the handle snapped off.

My face is stony. My body is rigid. My mother weeps, clutching my neck. Her auburn hair is scratchy on my neck and her **burgundy-bottled** eu de toilette swirls in my nose and muffles my breathing. She has no clue how uncomfortable my body is in her embrace, like she has no clue that her fancy Pierre Guerlain's Samsara bottle reads "toilet water," like she has no clue that I will flush the papaya slices she's packed for a plane ride snack, my one and only allergen.

She has no clue that "Samsara" is not French, but Sanskrit. Sa sara is the transmigration of beings through endless cycles of birth, of suffering, death, and again rebirth. Sam: Same. Same blood, same ancestry, same suffering. My mother is my mirror. Sar: to run, to flow, to glide. Away. I am running away. I do not yet have a clue that you are my reflection. For how many years and how many lives has our blood flowed, *sar*, in this same, *sam*, suffering? And if it's just the same to Buddha, can't we just flush this shit down the loo?

We are clueless. She communicates what is expected. She feels what she is supposed to feel. I wait for the moment to end. "Goodbye, Mother." I turn Red around and feel her eyes, newborn eyes, needing. My eyes hide the human behind. They are what a poet calls blank blue pools and what a therapist calls dissociative. They've had lots of practice. Like snake oil on lye, her energy coils around me and sheds off in bright red drops because there's not enough left; I am clean. I burn. I am strong. I am alone.

Today I am 18 and leaving home. I am not coming back. I am abandoning a little girl who will never become a woman.

I don't know who sees out of my mother's eyes. The one behind those watery Irish blues has shifted – once a god, slowly devolving into a tyrant, antagonist, patient, and now this lonely and terrified child. She grew down as I grew up, but I've been taking care of her since Valentine's Day 1988, and I'm afraid it's a lifetime commitment.

In the transitioning years between receiving overseas relatives from the rickety Yakima airport, and wheeling Big Red across PDX's iconic green and blue carpeting, one means of interacting with Mother went unchanged. Mother was jumpy and I was sneaky. I'd hide, contorted in the smallest and most unexpected spaces, knowing she was alone, and knowing I'd startle her, popping out at the last minute from behind doors and the depths of dark closets. I'd lurk underneath counters, beds, and cupboards, jumping out at the last second with a deep animal roar, errrAHHHHHHH, and leg it out of there in a fit of laughter, dodging the spillage of hot, "proper" British tea, bins of yard debris, or freshly folded laundry. She would rightfully rage, her M.O. in our relationship, but the protestations,

harrumphs, and exasperated clucks would nearly always be followed by an, “oh, you” or a “you goofball”. I’d cock my head to the side and peer at her from around a corner or behind a bannister’s rails. In those moments, I knew my mother loved me. Those phrases and that tone were a foreign dialect of a familiar language. I was my mother’s shadow.

I felt rejected by you since you were two.

What were my mother’s fantasies as her belly swelled to contain me?

“Your mother always wanted a little girl,” my dad would muse, when, as a child, I’d asked him why I didn’t get to be a boy. At my friend Jessica’s house, I’d climb up her pine tree and spy into the neighbor’s backyard where Jarod and Trevor would play Power Rangers or Jedi. I’d believed that boys didn’t have bedtimes on the weekends, that they ate pizza with stuffed crusts, maraschino cherries from the jar, and had terrific adventures that we missed out on.

“Your mother always wanted a girl.” I can see my mom in her aqua snakeskin bikini, despite her swollen belly, reclined on a beach chair above a splintering homestained deck, a glass of iced sweat tea to accompany her jar of pickle juice, sunning herself by the poolside and imagining me in pink, in lace, in Nanny’s hand – knitted doily-like duds, headbands, flowers, proms, and boyfriends, mommy-daughter gossip and nail-painting, baking and secret-baring.

By her definitions, I may have well come out a son. I threw tantrums when stuffed into a dress, unless it had Snow White or Pocahontas on it. I fell out of trees and into oceans, got myself into and out of scuffles with boys on the playground. I took pranks too far with teachers. I fed my sister dog food as Cocoa Pebbles and piss as apple juice. I peed standing up and made a mess, then shit in the sink for in return for the spanking I’d earned. I rode Erin Olander’s sled off of the roof of her dad’s tool shed and broom jousted with her brothers on Schwinn bicycles, hijacked our neighbor’s lawnmower, and set Sam Snyder’s shoe on fire with a magnifying glass stolen from the senile Mrs. Erickson. Let’s say I didn’t fulfill the fantasy brewed in the Yakima summer sun and steeped in the hopes of being given everything I never had thanks to poverty, a temper, and the pint.

I was my mother’s shadow.

More specifically, I became her shadow side, her dream deferred to another child. In the sharp vicissitudes of my mother’s fantasies I became the repository for the parts of her identity she could not accept and was unconsciously terrified of. In *Psychology and Religion*, Carl Jung declared that “everyone carries a shadow”. My mother carried hers in her belly and donated it to her blood. As long as I could be a naughty child, as long as I was selfish, sensitive, lazy, spoiled, I was never fully released and all was right with the world; god could exist in her heaven. —And in as much as I presently adopt these traits as my own identity, I am still the possession of

an ominous fantasy, perpetually Mommy's little girl waiting to be birthed.

Ten gather around the first bonfire of the season, welcoming the spring equinox together as women. Around the fire there are hopes and celebrations – engagements, desires for sisterhood, escapes out of homelessness and abusive relationships, prayers for healing hands to nourish ill partners, new businesses created. We listen deeply because it is both unspoken and understood that our presence pulls space for the other to be honored. Each woman marks her turn with salt on the fire. It sighs, sparks, and wells a purple-crimson at the base as it consumes her desires and gratitude. Our eyes on her stories balm the dross accumulated since the fall equinox, the last meeting. There are many needs expressed around the fire, rooted in profound loneliness, deaths of close friends, and chronic illnesses. Sachets of private symbols, marking what must be left behind in this new season, are offered to the flames. We feed the fire with our hands and we feed each other with our eyes: sister, mother, daughter, *I see you*.

Newcomers are welcomed with good Northwest beer and a communal recitation of “your name and the story of one scar you have.” Stories begin to unfold: Cesareans, two martini lunches, gnarly bike wrecks. My left hand hesitates and hovers over my right forearm. The mark left my body somewhere in adolescence and faded like the days when my mother was a god. Omnipotent still, she inserts herself into the circle.

Not that story. Too vulnerable. Too personal. Family business. Always so sensitive.

I parrot off a nail to the knee story and sister, mother, daughter remain words both familiar and elusive.

I cannot tell the story I want to tell. I cannot tell the story that I need to tell. I need to tell because my narrative is infused with the energy of deep yearnings and silent ragings. And like Mr. Soule taught in sophomore Chemistry, energy must be converted or transferred; it cannot be destroyed. Energy cannot be destroyed, but it is sufficient for destruction, and I feel I'm wise to fear the electric tendrils of my severed longings, whipping and snapping like amputated power lines.

I desire female relationships ferociously and the allure of female praise is intoxicating. My mother has her own fantasies of daughter and I have my own fantasies of mother. I longed and long to be adored with the undivided passion of a mother like Marmee in *Little Women* or adoptive mothers like Miss Honey in *Matilda* and the Boatwright sisters in *The Secret Life of Bees*. In college, on nights when my roommate Sierra was slogging through oral histories of Italian immigrants and I was going dizzy from analyzing the verses of transcendental poets, a pizza would be ordered and the room would fill with barefoot girls in striped pajamas. They'd spin stories of desire for men: boyfriends, husbands, flings, and one night stands, and I'd

withdraw into myself, recognizing the desire, which I shared, but also the awareness that my primary want was for a mother. I wanted the security of being able to call a mother on the phone –no time of the day was off limits, more than I wanted the thrill of a text from the cute English major at Dickinson who flirted with me at Easter. I wanted the comfort of a mother's arms more than the adventure and romance of the arms of the shy college boy wrapping me up after we'd scaled a building, peeping a concert we were too broke to pay for.

I realized that all of my friends would have their time, or at least a chance at their deepest relational longing. But through the middle of a pepperoni slice I'd always be jolted by the knowledge that I could never have mine, not now. I am a woman. I am too old to need a mother. I am an adult. I am an adult who carries within her her own children. I am pregnant with the suppressed shadow of my mother. In my womb lives a simmering child, raging silently, and in me and of me is the yearning woman-child, too late for a mother. Suppression, simmering, yearning. If I am vulnerable with these women, how will this energy be converted? Transferred? Rejected? I am too scared to see what happens if this terrible triplet is birthed.

I grew up terrified of god and terrified of my mother. I was convinced they both hated me because I was convinced I was bad.

As a grade school child, on the long mornings before my mother would head to work the afternoon shift at the local hospital, my sisters and I would accompany her on errands: the first stop was the ampm on the corner of our street. Mother would buy her topeavy, 64 oz. bucket of Diet Pepsi. Her Rimmel lipstick would stain the straw red, a repulsive mark of her own territory. She would not share. We'd pull into the drycleaner's where she'd pick up Daddy's work shirts. I'd sit backwards on the console of the suburban and depending on my mood I'd either play school with my little sisters, teaching them the names of dinosaurs and their predators or I would terrorize them by pushing buttons: the AC, the bass, the window lock, carefully explaining how each button would lead to our eminent death: send us through the glass windows of the cleaner's, blow up the engine once Mother turned the key, or eject mother 30,000 feet into the air when she turned on the lights.

Finally we'd make the long drive to Costco, out near the airport, past the city limits. On this road, my mother was a god. This snaking road and arid, scrub brush landscape felt like an eternity, and my sister and I were in a high stakes battle to be the good girl for the day. There could only be one winner. If it was Haley, she'd get a sweet tart lollipop or slice of Costco pizza for the ride home. If it was me, I'd get a peanut cluster or chocolate frozen yogurt. Instead of turning us into two angelic passengers, this setup

inspired a constant battle to sabotage the other. If I became my mother's shadow side, Haley was her shadow. She was, as described by Mother, "Mommy's little doll," a ballerina in pink leotards and tutus, wearing any flowered outfit my mother'd laid out for her. She was a tap dancer who parroted super adorable, super sexist routines to the delighted parents of the republican middle class, and most importantly, she padded around the house worshipfully imitating and adoring my mother. As I became my mother's shadow side, Haley became mine, and less subtly, my punching bag.

As a sophomore in high school, I was horrified to read about Calvinism and predestination in my Western Civilizations class. "This is an honors class" the teacher would grunt in response to our groaning protests, as he doled out the Belgic Confession. "God delivers... all whom he... hath elected... without respect to their works," I remember reading and thinking, *We're fucked! And we don't even know if we're fucked!* In one rare outburst I remember exclaiming, "The system is rigged!" which went over a lot better with Mr. Honors than, "We're all fucked!" I'm sure.

But-- my mother had worked like this god from the beginning. Maybe I was a sloppy instigator, or maybe my reputation preceded me, but as a child, I never discovered that my mother's system of good girl/ bad girl was also rigged. I don't ever remember coming home from Costco with a peanut cluster or chocolate froyo, just the nauseating smell of pizza or grinding molars on a sucker.

The system is rigged!

It doesn't matter what I do. I will not be accepted by my mother. I am the shadow. I am eternal torment. I am bad. I keep silent. I do not share with the circle of women. I am predestined for disconnection—from Mother, from my childhood to my womanhood, from the sparks on the fire and the severings I harbor instead.

I stood agape in the concrete foyer of Costco, bodies rushing in and out, forklifts beeping warnings, as my mother bought Haley yet another slice of cheese pizza, my right forearm leaving a trail of blood on the smooth concrete, a fresh, four inch wound where Haley's long nails had just dug deep and mean.

Psychologically, children cannot bare the possibility that their parents are flawed, so they prosecute themselves when the facts don't add up. Dumbfounded at the results of my scar, I could only draw a few conclusions.

I deserve this scar. I am bad.

The narrative made sense and god was still in her heaven. I was too young to understand that Haley was my mother's pride and joy, predestined to win her lolly of many colors. I so desperately craved the acceptance of my mother, and slowly she authored my identity: bad.

Nearly two decades later, I long to redefine these relationships around

the fire: mother, sister, daughter, but as I share my own desires to be birthed this spring, as the days grow longer and more pregnant with possibility, I cannot bring myself to meet the eyes of the women. There is a hopelessness in the safety of my pride and strength. It has helped me survive this far. I know the scar that alienates me can only be redeemed by a sororal solidarity. Jung also said that “the shadow is the seat of creativity.” In my womanhood I possess the unique ability to create, harbor, and sustain life. My body has been scarred in the marrings of its yearnings, simmerings, and suppressions. My body is the marker that bridges the gap between the wild powerlessness of my girlhood energy and the creative capability of my woman’s womb. Mother, daughter, sister, seer: I know that the salvation of my womanhood is made the connections that have so violently been aborted, and I still choose the safety of my reclusive pride, the safety of being unseen. And I am still terrified of god.

Mini Bike Winter*By Anna Lennau*

You and me and Matt bike around Portland in the cold. We wind up at this warehouse south of the city, far away from everything, stuck around a fire, no where to sleep. I try not to complain and you tell me, Just wait. You talk to this old guy and he is drunk, drunk, drunk and we're all pretty drunk except maybe me. Around the fire someone offers us a joint. We follow this old guy home, he's gonna give us a place to stay, nice old man. You say, We're just helping this old drunk man get home. Stumbling by the fire, he says, I haven't drank this much since college. We ride and ride and ride northeast of the city, rows and rows and rows of houses, so many little people houses, houses all in a row, so many places, places to go, and we are almost there, but at some point, even though I'm drunk, I get the feeling we're circling, and he admits he's just feeling it out but we finally get to his big old house. Shows us to his daughters' old room next to his on the top floor. Shows us the bathroom, towels, though we know we won't use them, puts Matt in the basement where the drum set is, where his mother and sister live. We open the door to the biggest closet we've ever seen, it goes back, back, farther and farther and you let rip your paranoia, how Henry our host is gonna murder us, cut out our tongues, our hearts and you are laughing, I am laughing, we are spooked witless, hilarious, trying not to laugh because he's probably sleeping already in the next room, or listening at the door, planning our murder. You check all the doors, the closet again, every little corner of this enormous room, place a chair under the closet door to keep out the ghosts, because we found boxes of photos from the 90's of his daughters and his dead wife. He told me everything as we rode through the night, how he almost died

of cancer after his wife, so his mother and sister moved in. It went into remission, still 50 pounds overweight, he tried the gym and hated it. One day driving to work he looks over and sees this bicyclist and thinks, he looks way happier than I feel. At 57 he starts to ride a bike. A week later he's riding to work an hour and a half one way, everyday, never been happier. He's got a soft spot for the PDX Sprockets, the bicycle dance troupe. That's why he was out tonight. How do you know all of this, you ask? He told me as we were riding to his house while you were talking about death and Henry plotting our murders, the paranoia freaking you out to a humming buzzing rhythm of delight. Let's go find Matt, you say. He might be murdered! Henry could be killing him right now! We stumble downstairs as quietly as we can except we are not quiet at all, laughter screaming inside of us, we grope through the dark for the right door and there are many, Country music blaring behind one, this cannot be Matt our hipster drummer friend! A dog barks at us from a black room and an old woman cries out, Max! Quiet down now! Maggie, is that you? Max be quiet! We are almost pissing our pants because we cannot laugh out loud, squeezing my thighs together so hard, because Max knows we are there but she doesn't. We find Matt in the big old basement den full of musical instruments, a record player, darts and ping pong, a drum set, a house full of antiques that aren't meant to be, they've just been there ever since the family and it is way funner than upstairs except for those old family photos. We are laughing so hard, maniacal, hysteric, Matt looks a bit frightened, wonders what is wrong with us and we tell him that Henry is a murderer, and we've come to save him but we can barely get the words out, because we have smoked too much and drank too much and it is all too much and secretly and not so secretly Henry is the nicest man we have ever met and how could we ever say such a thing about this nicest man in the world.

Mountain Lake*By Anna Lennau*

Naked in the most delicious lake this skin ever tasted,
after a long sweat-soaked bike ride around the horseshoe
of Orcas Island, my clumsy backstroke makes dark silver ripples
on the sun-glittered surface. Eyes chug this blue pillowed sky
with evergreen peripheral vision and the clear water underneath
only scares me a bit, glimpse of tree carcass limbs and leaves
in the deep. My edges trimmed, envelope slip through slow-moving
no-current, its coolness off-putting my element. Just when I think I can't,
I make it to what I'll call Jackson's Island, an island within an island,
a place I want to stay and feel the bright soft moss under my too-soft feet
ruffled by burnt canyon clay they gripped getting up here. I imagine Huck
and Sawyer frying fish and smoking "tobbackey" over there and I would stay
the night if only I weren't naked and the water so cold.

Fish Stick and Chocolate Ice Cream Cupcakes

By *Kristina Horner*

You ever have one of those days?

I'm smack dab in the middle of one of those days right now, and it's all because of fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcakes.

I'm in detention.

I guess that's not a life-altering statement — lots of kids get detention. That's why detention exists.

But I'm not one of those kids. I'm the kid who makes all the other kids mad when teachers decide to grade on the curve, because my scores are always in the upper ninety-percent range. School's just... easy for me.

But today I'm in detention, and it's because of fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcakes.

And because I punched my classmate in the mouth.

Humanities, period four, twelve fourteen in the afternoon. Mr. Dunbar asked us to swap creative writing projects so that we could do peer review. I got stuck with Frankie Lipscomb, on account of our desks being across from each other.

Frankie is exactly the kind of kid you'd imagine would spend a lot of time in detention. The fact that he's not here right now is probably setting the planets out of alignment, to be honest.

I started reading his story, which was an impressively dull account of a boring kid's summer vacation. It was dull even by Frankie's standards, and Frankie's papers are usually either non-existent, or hovering somewhere around the realm of "the very barest of minimums".

I was trying to be relatively nice though, you know, not marking it up too much with my red pen... until I saw it.

The lack of a serial comma.

Few things irk me as much as the lack of a serial comma. Well, actually — okay. I can be a sort of walking explosion of pet peeves and minor annoyances, but I'll settle on stating that the lack of serial commas has a very special place up near the top of that list.

"Hey Frankie," I whispered, wanting to make sure I drove this point home rather than just leaving it on his page in red pen he'd maybe never even read. "There should really be a comma here," I pointed to the offending sentence. "This sentence."

Frankie sighed a needlessly loud sigh and cast his eyes toward my finger.

"Bernie arrived at the picnic and was happy to see all of his favorite foods," Frankie read from the page.

"Not that one," my tone was impatient. "The next one."

Frankie rolled his eyes, but kept reading. "There were many types of food sitting out, but his favorite of course were the cupcakes, fish sticks

and chocolate ice cream.” He rolled his eyes a second time. “What’s the problem?”

“Well,” I began slowly, as if talking to a child. “This sentence is ambiguous. It kind of makes it sound like Bernie’s favorite food could be fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream flavored cupcakes.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Precisely.”

“No, not precisely. That’s stupid.”

“This isn’t called peer review for nothing. You’re supposed to listen to me. You need to use more precise language.”

“You need to use more precise shut up!” Frankie was yelling now, which earned us a “first warning” glare from Mr. Dunbar.

We both turned our heads back to our desk and quit talking until Mr. Dunbar looked away. He began scribbling something on a piece of paper, so I knew we were clear.

“I’m marking this as incorrect grammar,” I whispered, uncapping my red pen for effect.

Frankie looked furious, and continued to whisper in indignation. “So you’re telling me you think a reader would be dumb enough to think Bernie’s favorite food is fish stick and chocolate ice cream cupcakes?”

I shrugged. “Maybe. It’s unclear, so it’s very possible. Who knows, fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcakes might be delicious.”

“Only a stupid idiot would think fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcakes might be delicious, and the way I write it makes no difference.”

This time it was my turn to seethe. It was simple grammar. You can’t argue grammar.

As if he could read my thoughts, Frankie smirked and chided, “I’m not adding the comma, no matter how much red pen you put on my paper.”

That’s when I punched him in the mouth.

It was in the name of grammar, though!

In all, detention isn’t so bad. There’s a teacher, Mrs. Webster, at the front of the room typing away on a computer. There are six other kids here, and they’re all just grumbling to themselves, glaring at the ceiling, or sitting absolutely still.

Which makes absolutely no sense, because Mrs. Webster told us we could work quietly or read if we wanted to.

I don’t understand why these kids wouldn’t be reading or getting their homework done. I am literally doing the exact same thing I would be doing at home — my math homework is neatly stacked beside me, already finished. In my hands is the newest installment in my favorite fantasy series, *The Lost Princess Chronicles*. If the consequences of punching a stupid kid in the mouth are getting some good, uninterrupted reading time in, maybe I should look into becoming a bully. Or a prize fighter — I think that’s probably a better return on investment.

Anyway, I'm about two-thirds of the way into my book and zero percent of the way into regretting this situation when Harriet and Sophia come into the room. I can hear them whispering to Mrs. Webster but I can't hear what they're saying. Harriet and Sophia are also smart kids, but they're the kind who focus more of their energy into student leadership than anything else.

I don't have anything against student leadership, but I prefer reading books to making brightly colored posters, is all. Anyway, Harriet and Sophia are this dynamic duo that are always finding ways to kiss up to the school, which is fine, but I'm really not sure what they're doing in the detention room after school.

Mrs. Webster is nodding, then frowning slightly, glancing slightly at those of us in the room, then nodding some more.

Then she smiles.

"That sounds lovely, girls. Bring it on in."

Everyone in the room is suddenly rapt with attention, waiting to see what "it" is. Harriet is pushing and Sophia is pulling and between them is a big silver cart, topped with what looks like a... a feast?

"We're working on a psychology project for the science fair," Sophia begins. Harriet nods along with her. "We want to see if helping to nurture the students who get detention would help them end up here less often. So we made a deal with the kitchen staff to take the leftovers from that day's lunch and bring them to you for a week to see how it affects numbers. Feel free to come up and put together a plate of snacks."

Immediately I see the flaw in their thesis. Offering people free food is the surest way to guarantee attendance, not to discourage it. This plan is going to backfire on them pretty drastically, especially when word gets out during school tomorrow. I'm actually really interested to see by what factor the number of students in detention increases over the week.

But it's not my science fair project, so I keep my mouth shut. Don't bite the hand that feeds you, and all that.

I make my way up to the food cart at the front of the classroom. I can see a variety of pre-packaged brownies with and without nuts, a few leftover grilled cheese sandwiches, and a bowl of mixed vegetables that no one seems to be touching. There's a basket of fried things, of which I can make out chicken nuggets, french fries and... oh goodness. There, off in the corner, is a single fish stick. I snatch it up just as my eyes land on the bottom rack of the cart.

A few large cartons of ice cream. A couple of day-old cupcakes. Other things, but those clearly aren't important.

I'm momentarily paralyzed with the hilarity of the situation, but snap out of it when Harriet notices what I'm looking at and hands me an ice cream scoop.

I'm pouncing on the chocolate tub before anyone else can get their

grimy fingers on it.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you here,” Harriet says pointedly, yanking the lids off the various tubs of ice cream with a precision and poise that impresses even me. I wonder if she practiced her “scientist” mannerisms in front of a mirror. She probably did.

“Trying something new.” My tone is casual. I nonchalantly pick up a cupcake from the bottom rack.

Without another word and without making eye contact, I plop one medium sized scoop of chocolate right on top of the day old cupcake. I hear a small gasp of alarm out of Harriet but I am on a mission. I pay no attention.

Instead, I balance the fish stick gingerly on top of the whole mess and pick it up with my thumb and middle finger.

Before she can ask me any more irritating questions, I turn and hurry back to my desk, taking care not to let my snack teeter in the process. I’m eager to prove Frankie Lipscomb wrong and do not need this small talk getting in the way.

The ice cream is already melting.

I take a moment to admire my creation, mentally laughing at Frankie as I begin to lift the fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcake to my mouth. Ha! I imagine Frankie’s stupid face, his eyes bulging out at what I am about to do. Ha ha! I continue, imagining how stupid he’ll feel when this recipe makes me a billionaire.

I’m not actually certain how a recipe can make a person a billionaire — but I’m a smart kid, I’ll work that out later.

At last. I bring it to my lips, making sure to get a little of each ingredient in my first bite. I sink my teeth in...

...and spit the whole thing out. All over my desk. All over my math homework and the newest installment in my favorite fantasy series, *The Lost Princess Chronicles*. Everywhere.

I’m devastated. I want to vomit, both because of the taste of cold fish stick mixed with stale cupcake and runny ice cream, and the knowledge that Frankie Lipscomb was in fact... correct. I have terrible, horrible, irrefutable proof that fish-stick-and-chocolate-ice-cream cupcakes are a terrible food choice, and should always be factored out of an ambiguous sentence, no matter how important grammar is. I want to cry.

Does this make me the stupid idiot?

Darn you, Frankie Lipscomb. Darn you once for your stupid face, darn you twice for this stupid, awful snack, and darn you three times for the desk-washing duty I’ve been assigned for tomorrow’s detention.

I throw my copy of *The Lost Princess Chronicles* away, as the chocolate has made it unreadable. I was only on chapter four.

I hate Frankie Lipscomb.

I pull a couple of fresh sheets of lined paper from my backpack to start

my math homework over. I hate redoing things.

He's the one who should be in detention, not me.

I go to the drinking fountain at the back of the room, trying to get the awful taste out of my mouth — but no matter what I do I can still taste it, lingering in my mouth. A constant reminder of my failure.

And now a few of the kids in detention are calling me “fish breath”, which is both wholly unoriginal and super embarrassing.

I slump back down at my desk, relishing in the unfairness of my life. I'm being punished for wanting there to be good grammar in the world. Really I should get a medal, but instead I have forty more minutes of detention and terrible fish breath.

I was wrong. This isn't one of those days. This is the day by which all other days will be measured.

I will get you back for this, Frankie Lipscomb. Just you wait.

marigold seasons in auburn

By Jianda Monique

marigold seasons in auburn

always
you are spring to me
i pack light when i
travel' with you

i remember that i can't fight the ocean
so we find one
and i let myself float

there are many eternities in 1 day
1 hour
1 idea with you

and in the idea
of you

i think maybe hold off
and rest a while
but you already and
always have your tickets booked

and you reserved two

i hear your feet padding up to my
doormat
big smile
and your bare heels are muddy

even at the thought of you
it's always

come
on
in
!

please show me your colors*By Jianda Monique*

please show me your colors
your heart
your lines
show me your fk ups
roadmaps to your blind spots
i can sometimes help you drive
i have a little locket
it is magic
all your blushes and your stutters and your lumps of coal,
well, you place them in this locket, see
i wear it overnight and disappear it
you can tell that we have let it go, together,
because you see these things in waking dreams
and when you trip all over them, all over yourself,
you laugh...instead of dying.

Decadence

By Matt Quarterman

Our abandon and greed
will seem almost innocent
in retrospect, adorable even.
The way things do when they
are foolish
and so far gone.

George Clooney Weds in Venice*By Matt Quarterman*

Let's say
the earth tilts
a little more than
twenty-three point four
degrees and
the season you thought
existed and was your
favorite is no more
and the tidal
wave or plate shift
of your continent
edges out another
and the climate
you were born beneath
will never come
again – is this
any stranger?
Can we understand?

Contributor Biographies



MB Austin is a mild-mannered civil servant by day. In her off hours, she plays with actual humans in the dojo and with imaginary ones on her computer. Her novel-length works in progress all fit into one of two sets: a series of contemporary thrillers featuring Maji Rios (blackbelt, polyglot, soldier, queer Brooklynite); and the Mosaic series, genderqueer steampunk tales set in the late 1800's Mediterranean. MB lives with her wife in Seattle. For additional backstory, visit www.mbaustin.me



Shannon Marie Chavez has worked as a graphic artist for the last fifteen years. She worked on a number of magazine and newspaper publications during her time as a staff designer at McClatchy Newspapers and later, Freedom Publications. Her most recent freelance project was the re-design and maintenance of the website for cascadewriters.com. She's also been known to take art commissions and has done a number of digital character artworks. Examples of design and art work can be found at dreamingthought.wordpress.com. Shannon also writes under the pen, M.S. Chavez. She writer of both fantasy and science fiction stories which range from dark fairy tales to urban fantasy to dystopian worlds. She has written a number of short stories, many of which can be found at Wattpad.com. She's currently working on a series of fantasy novels.



Michele Graaff is originally from a small Central Washington college town surrounded by hay fields, where she learned to drive a stick-shift and not wear cowboy boots. She earned her B.A. in Secondary English Education and went on to teach, work in a prosecutor's office, and, currently, advise in a graduate program. Between careers, she has fought for a taxi cab in Abu Dhabi, and learned the best burn remedy using onion peelings in Morelia, Mexico. She currently lives and writes in the suburbs of Seattle, occasionally sharing moments about grief ninjas and break-up boots on her blog: michelegwrites.wordpress.com. Her poetry has also been published in *The Wolf Skin* online literary journal.



Emily Davis is originally from Portland and has been a teacher in Seatac for the past five years. She began taking creative writing classes last spring. Her narrative, *Red*, came out of a memoir class at the Hugo House and her poem, *Emma*, came out of an Old Growth poetry class this past spring. She is currently taking another writing class at The Seattle School. When not teaching or writing, she enjoys rock climbing and hiking.



Kristina Horner is a Seattle local who's been writing since she learned how to hold a pencil. What started as silly stories scribbled into a marbled composition notebook evolved into fanfiction, novels, and a popular online blog. While she's yet to publish any of her books, Kristina has successfully completed NaNoWriMo nine times and really intends to get on with editing something one of these days. She also enjoys making costumes (and wearing them at conventions), making videos for her YouTube channel, and working toward her current reading goal of 75 books this year. In her free time (haha), she works at Microsoft. That was a joke, Microsoft is her day job.



Anna Lennau is a gender/queer writer living in Seattle. Ze is working on finding a home for zer memoir and writing more poetry. This November, Anna is diving into the National Novel Writing Month Challenge and will finish zer first novel. Anna's great passions in life are friends, bicycles, coffee, going on really long bike rides, talking about feelings, writing, pounding out dramatic ballads ze wrote on the piano or guitar, recovering from Christianity and capitalist society, and falling in love with dogs and trees and the occasional human baby. Anna's next great adventure includes – besides finding a home for that memoir and recording some of those beltars – learning Spanish and teaching English in Spain. After that, the dream is to find the most magical dog ever to share zer life with.



Jianda Monique is a multi-genre artist, vocalist, writer, amateur coder/photographer, musician, artist coach and ed tech enthusiast...for starters. Growing up on the project management side of the music/entertainment industries (MP3.com/eMusic, Geocities/Yahoo, iXL, blogger for RollingStone.com, BlogCritics et al), you may have experienced her work in UC Irvine's "Faultline," music projects by Tycho, Om Records, select film and TV soundtracks, and more. Jianda is still riding the wave of 0's and 1's for the betterment of community, culture, heart and soul. Visit or contact Jianda on Twitter @jiandamonique or email heartsongs101@gmail.com.



Matt Quarterman moved to Seattle in 2007 after having lived in Portugal, Ukraine, Mississippi, and Massachusetts. He earned a degree in English and another in Songwriting. His poems have been published in *The Penwood Review* and he plays with several Seattle bands including Star Called Sun (www.starcalledsun.com).

General and Contributing Editor Biographies

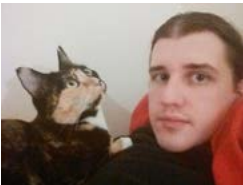
All editors have served as facilitators of Writer's Workshops at Old Growth Northwest.



Allison Cloud is a graduate of the University of Washington in Creative Writing with Russian literature and History minors. When not binge watching every BBC show ever made, she usually can be found wandering around Ballard, browsing bookstores, or playing with her neurotic and adorable yellow lab, Boomer.



Erin Fried is the Executive Director of Old Growth Northwest and coordinates the Writer's Workshops program. In addition to leading workshops on editing and publishing, she teaches for Old Growth's Voices Beyond Bars program at the state prison in Monroe, Washington. For her day job, she teaches creative writing to children.



Ian Greenfield has participated in or managed Old Growth programs for almost two years and is excited to join the Board of Directors. A Pacific Northwest native who has been running writing workshops since 2009, Ian wants to see literature and the arts flourish both in and between communities and cultures. He has helped dozens of writers improve

their craft and has led conversations on topics ranging from publishing to what kinds of things can go in a writer's toolkit. His specialty as a writer is fantasy and horror fiction. While his workshops focus on the craft of fiction writing, Ian is also a poet, with work recently appearing in *POPLORISH* and *Sten o*.



Benjamin Schmitt is the author of two books, *Dinner Table Refuge* (forthcoming, PunksWritePoemsPress) and *The global conspiracy to get you in bed* (Kelsay Books, 2013). His poetry has appeared in *Sakura Review*, *Hobart*, *Grist*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Two Thirds North*, and elsewhere. He also

reviews books of poetry for *At The Inkwell*. He lives with his wife and daughter in Seattle where he teaches workshops to people of all ages.

Erin Fried, General Editor

Contributing Editors

Allison Cloud

Ian Greenfield

Benjamin Schmitt

Old Growth Northwest

is a literary nonprofit serving a diverse community of writers and readers in the Pacific Northwest. To learn more about Old Growth's programs, including the Writer's Workshops, please visit www.oldgrowthnw.org.

