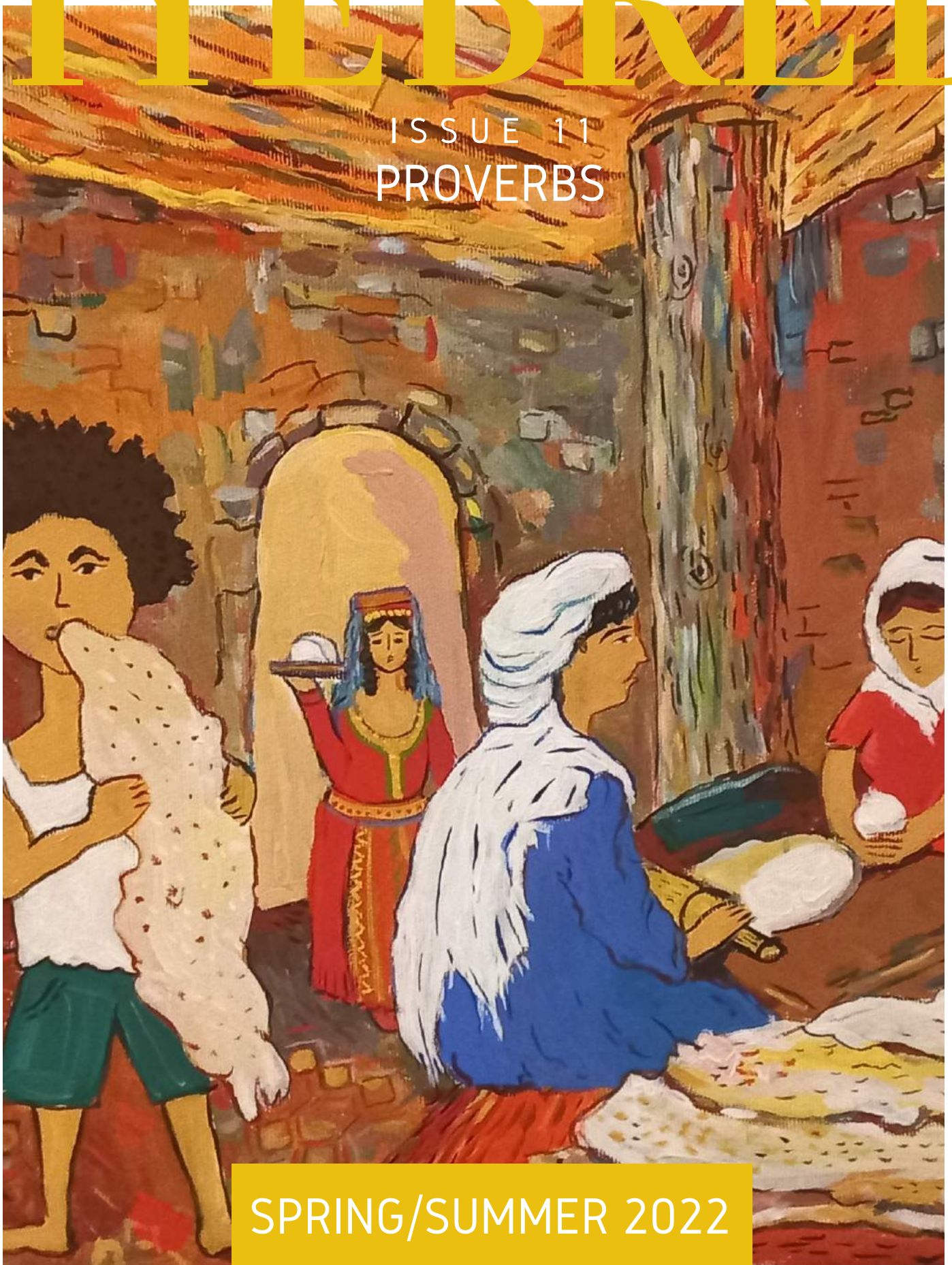


# HYEBRED

ISSUE 11  
PROVERBS



SPRING/SUMMER 2022

*cover art: "Bakery" by Armen Sayar*

# Masthead

**Rafaella Safarian**

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**Nour-Ani Sisserian**

*film/art/music editor*

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*poetry editor*

# Proverbs

Ժամանակը անգին գանձ է նրա համար ով գնահատում է դրա արժեքը:

*Time is a priceless treasure for those who know its worth.*

Ասա ընկերդ ով է, կասեմ դու ով ես:

*Tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are.*

Մեզք մեզքի տանք սարեր շուռ կտանք:

*If we back each other up, we can overturn mountains.*

Ամեն մի խոսք անգին գանձ է՝ նայած ում էս դու ասում:

*Each of your words is a jewel, but to whom do you offer them?*

Աշխարհը ծով է, բայց բայմենք դեռ ծարավ ենք:

*The world is a sea, yet we are thirsty.*

Ով շատ է խոսում քիչ է սովորում:

*He/She who speaks a lot learns a little.*

Ծառ կա՞ որ քամի կպած չլինի:

*Where is there a tree not shaken by the wind?*

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# Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to peruse our eleventh issue! This issue is particularly meaningful because it presents a collection of contemporary pieces rooted in traditional Armenian proverbs.

We typically pass down proverbs via oral tradition. After all, a “proverb” is defined as “a short popular saying, usually of unknown and ancient origin, that expresses effectively some commonplace truth or useful thought.”\* With time—and each telling and retelling—the meaning of proverbs may change. We may interpret them differently than the generations before us.

For this issue, we asked our contributors to submit pieces inspired by one of seven proverbs. The result is awe-inspiring. From poetry to stories to—for the first time—sheet music, each featured artist presents their very own retelling of a traditional proverb.

We hope that you'll ponder what these proverbs mean to you. We encourage you to interpret each one for yourself and challenge their meaning. Discussing how tradition folds into the modern context may allow us as the new generation to forge our own proverbs and traditions.

Thank you for reading!

**Շնորհակալություն,**

Rafaella Safarian  
*Editor-in-Chief*

\* “Proverb,” *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/proverb>.





# The Toot Tree

## Lena Halteh

My childhood summers were spent in Providence, Rhode Island doing things most kids these days wouldn't care to do. Afternoons consisted of playing "Hot and Cold" with my cousins and waiting for the frozen lemonade truck to summon us with its tinkling rendition of "The Entertainer" as it made its way down Goddard Street.

Dedeh (Grandpa) would walk down the front steps to buy us a few cups before returning to his seat on the porch and most often, a cigarette.

We were children of the 90s, left to our Walkman players, our Nicktoons and Little Mermaid pajamas.

Those warm East Coast nights had us sharing many Lebanese-Armenian meals around the kitchen table, but if I could assign one flavor to our childhood summers in Providence it would be that of toot (mulberries)—a taste that followed Mom's family from a neighbor's lot in Beirut to Dedeh's backyard.

Something about reaching up into the green in search of the black fruit; of purple-stained palms and of sunlight streaming through leaves to create speckled patterns on the concrete below, that stays with you. I haven't been back to Providence and seldom encountered toot after that, (though finding some off the road in the Armenian countryside stirred up such sweet nostalgia), but I often think about those summers with my grandparents, in hindsight realizing how few they were. And I wonder about the toot tree, if it's still there and if it gives fruit.



# Musings of Motherhood

*L. K. M.*

Friends, it's been a while since I've put pen to paper, paint to canvas, created something—anything—new. And so, a looming, postpartum-induced sense of self-doubt rears its unwelcome head, running a toxic internal monologue through my brain like a scrolling ticker. Thoughts of “not belonging” in this space or of “too much time having passed” are pervasive and most unwelcome, but for at least today, I come to you determined, bouncing littlest baby on my thigh and listen-

ing to the older two fight over Sven the reindeer or whatever as I unapologetically insert this ritual into my day; a day devoid of sweating the trivial list of cliches (was tripping over a minefield of wooden food toys annoying? sure). The point is, today I spent a little time with the works of Joan Didion while breastfeeding. Today, I shaved my legs after what appears to have been a month (the greatest of victories). Today, I got lost for about 10 minutes in my “Armenian

Folk revisited” playlist. I sketched out the illustration you see here. And today, I wrote this. There's something about unearthing one's voice and reconnecting with the things that feed us that lifts us beyond the fear and uncertainty of our current scenarios, even if for a moment. So today friends, I will take tremendous comfort in this, along with a pint of ice cream in the freezer that has my name on it.





# The Olive Tree

The old olive trees of Palestine—those that haven't been uprooted—stand peacefully in resistance.





# The Other Side

The sun does rise on the other side  
and the things that belong to us always will.  
With each new season, roots take hold,  
Reaching down through the soil  
to which they are bound.  
The mountain casts a shadow  
And smiles over the solemn land  
Painted red by native blooms.  
She does not answer to lines drawn by man.  
She knows who once walked her plains.  
She knows they can't be separated.



## Հասմիկ | Hasmik

The jasmine shrubs at my parents' house begin to bloom in mid-February. By March the pinkish-white blossom clouds are at their peak, releasing a perfume that awakens memory—the glow of candles at Friday evening Lenten services, the feel of frilly socks and white patent leather shoes, the boiling of eggs and onion skins, the taste of choreg on Easter Sunday. It is the sweet scent of jasmine that signals Spring.

Lena is a San Francisco-based writer and illustrator. She graduated from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism in 2016 and later launched Pom + Peacock, an art brand inspired by her children's blended Armenian and Palestinian heritage. Her work is rooted in generational storytelling and connecting with her audience through cultural nostalgia. It is also influenced by over two decades of performing and teaching with ARAX Dance.



# if we back each other up we can (re)turn mountains

## Carene Rose Mekertichyan

“odar” / a word my family never used / well / not in that particular way / you know / that way that makes my face hot / wondering if everyone else can see the target between my eyebrows / I thank god I was spared / for some time

“odar” // “other” // seemingly one in the same / it’s the verb that troubles me / some would say it “others” out of love / out of self preservation / out of necessity / I would say it is a slur / a separation / between us and them

“odar” / pervasive / a microcosm of our community in one word / our greatest fear / our supposed salvation / a reminder to those who threaten what’s left / who’s left / protection in insularity / safety in solitude / “all we have is each other and that’s all we need, right?”

“odar” / a marker of those within our community deemed traitorous by birth / those whose mixed identity / whose queer identity / whose deviation from the norm threatens our community / what we’ve been conditioned to think is our community

“odar” / this curse turned blessing when a point must be made / when you’re “one of the good ones” / when you “act like you’re 100%” / when you “look Armenian” / when you are fetishized / when you are seen as an outlier among deviants / “so patriotic for a community you’re simultaneously destroying, no?”

“odar” / it’s funny / those who use this term to alienate often speak of unity / a unity that doesn’t exist / rarely exists // ephemeral // it surrounds me in an instant / forget-me-nots brush against my heels / an ancient rhythm finds its way to my wrists / my index finger and thumb raised in traffic / noor juice tints my lips / the smell of fresh matnakash makes the hairs in my nose sway as if cradled by tatik / it fills me / feels me / and my place in our eternity // dismissal // gatekeeping / a slur / and she is gone

“odar” / if we are not a monolith, must they be? / who says they can not understand? / who says we understand? / who says we don’t have shared struggles? / shared survival? / who says solidarity is impossible? / those who benefit from lateral violence say so / and we listen

“odar” / within this community / outside this community / partner in trauma / partner in resistance / partner in shared liberation / “if we back each other up we can overturn mountains” / a proverb endlessly aspirational / inspirational / universal / full of hope and longing / how soon we forget / we are our mountains // returning //

~

Carene is an artist, organizer, educator, and proud Angelena. As a Black-Armenian woman, she is drawn to storytelling that centers marginalized narratives and believes true art exists to create empathy and social change. Her identity and upbringing in Los Angeles informs both her art and intersectional activism. She is the co-founder of Yerazad, an organization centered on coalition building and transnational solidarity. She serves as the artistic associate for Social Justice at Independent Shakespeare Co., Director of Programs at Support Black Theatre, and was selected as a 2021 Arts for LA Activate Delegate. She is a teaching artist with Creative Acts and the Unusual Suspects. She has performed with numerous theater companies and her plays and spoken word have been produced at Edinburgh Fringe, MeetCute LA, Company of Angels, Independent Shakespeare Co., and "We the People Theater Action." She is also an essayist, with work published by *LAist*, *University of Texas Press*, *The Armenian Weekly*, and *Kooyrigs*. She received her training from Dartmouth College and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA).

# Women of Oghak

## Nour-Ani Sisserian

Oghak NGO was established in November 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia.

Its mission is to empower Armenian women by providing them with educational, moral, and psychological support. By improving their knowledge and skills, women consolidate their role inside their community and effectively contribute to its wellbeing.

Oghak NGO is dedicated to preserve Armenian identity through its culture and traditions. Armenian national embroidery constitutes an important part of this heritage. This video features the committed work of the handcraft group's women, our national embroidery professionals, and gives you a glimpse of the embroidery classes.

These pieces are not just beautiful works of art. They also reflect the longing of our historical homeland. They represent the hard and ongoing work of Armenian women, and the transmission of Armenian cultural values, which you have the opportunity to support and acquire.

[WATCH HERE](#)

~

Nour-Ani Sisserian is a French-Armenian writer and theatre director currently living in Armenia.



# Lost in Corridors and Sunsets

## Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian

Our neighbor on the sixth floor, Madame Zahraa, thought that our corridor on the second floor was the safest of all places. First floor was too close to the ground, and therefore risked being a site for shrapnel; third floor was too high above the ground, and therefore risked being a target to bombs. More than 10 people slept cooped up in our corridor for months during the Lebanese Civil War. It started in 1975—even before I was born—and ended in 1990. Or was it 1991? When did the war really end?

Madame Zahraa lived in our bedroom for over three years. She went up to her apartment for occasional showers only. Her excuse was the lack of water. She wasn't alone though. My dad's aunt, Meme, and her husband Sebouh Baboug, who were Zahraa's neighbors, slept in our bedroom also. My sister and I felt displaced for years. Refugees in our own home, I slept on a green mattress that Mom had bought from a colleague at the American University of Beirut. She remembered her friend fondly and was still surprised how they decided to sell everything they owned, and immigrated to the US. Overnight almost. Tsolet, my sister, slept on an older, red and yellow patterned mattress that was torn from the sides. She always gave me the best of everything.

The corridor became our forever shelter. Our playground also. When the Lebanese Civil War became unbearable, and we were imprisoned at home long before COVID lockdowns, Tsolet decided it was time to have a publication: she called it *Cactus*. "It's like war," she explained to me. "It hurts you when you try to hold it, but there is some kind of twisted beauty in it." Of course, I asked her many times about the beauty of war. Her answer was along the same lines: "I get to bond with my little sister and annoy her." We wrote out our articles by hand and distributed our publication to members of the household. Some neighbors also. We wrote about people who died; neighbors; possible ceasefires; how we missed our friends; famous dishes created by our parents. Some issues were about easy bread recipes, and others gave hope about permanent ceasefires: grown-ups referred to it as peace. We even interviewed famous people: one was Dad's cousin from Germany who saw beauty in a country on its deathbed.

In between issue publications, after we would exhaust ourselves with Monopoly, Tsoler and I would curl up in our corridor and wait. I would hold my blue blanket in one hand and suck my thumb shamelessly. My blue blanket was my talisman. It gave me such comfort that I resorted to its powers until I was almost in university. When we would hear gunfire or bombs showering over us, we would count. One. Two. Three. Four bombs. “Other families have to run to shelters,” Mom would boast. “We have our own shelter in our house.” I know now that she did not believe that. But the several times that we had gone to shelters, Baba had refused to come with us. He did not want to leave Meme and company alone at home. One such place was the nearby basement of the Armenian Evangelical Central High School which was transformed into a shelter. Ordinarily, it was an art studio, but war time allowed for such transformations. The eerie smell of urine clung onto its walls though, as busy mothers distributed Maling sandwiches—some with bread.

“Ashrafieh [our neighborhood in Beirut] is the beginning, Ashrafieh is the story of liberation...” This was a song that would play on the radio—the Voice of Lebanon. They would usually play this song specifically before heavy shelling. Zahraa and Meme would argue about bomb types. “Asiga Aoun-e nedets.” [This one is by Aoun]. That was Zahraa with her usual bitter analysis and guesses. How did she know? Meme knew the ones by Geagea, and Sebouh Baboug disagreed with everyone. And so they would list the militia leaders, political party leaders; it was, after all, a guessing game. All the three elderly residents of our home blessed the different politicians involved in the war with Armenian swear words. They were not simple ones insulting one’s sister or mother, or even one’s intelligence. Meme’s favorite was wishing sterility to all those involved in creating this war. Madame Zahraa’s was: “Vizernin dagernin mena.” One could argue that it almost translates into “May they rot in hell,” but the juicy part is that it actually means: “May their necks twist and crack” or “hope their necks come under themselves.”

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If there was one person I particularly disliked from our wide array of relatives and guests, it was Sebouh Baboug. My sister and I still have a joke about lentil soup, inspired by him. During the 1980s, lentil soup was a luxury: so many vegetables, neatly combined with lentils—lemon, Swiss chard, carrots, and potatoes.

We only had it when we actually were able to have lunch in the kitchen and we did not have to curl up in the corridor, eating Maling—sandwiched between tomato slices. Baba wasn't home for days. His job as a school book specialist and consultant required him to travel to different parts of Lebanon. He used to cross to West Beirut almost every day. Going through the "maabar" [crossing], or the green line, that connected East and West Beirut was one of the most dangerous routes. We used to hear so many stories about people who went missing or were kidnapped and tortured. During those rare times when Baba was actually at home, and through divine intervention we had all that it took to make lentil soup, we so looked forward to this wartime feast. The unwritten table etiquette was simple: when we were lucky enough to sit around the kitchen table, we would all eat together *quietly*. Also, no leaving the table, even when you were done eating. Until Baba was done eating. And he sure ate slowly. Mama would serve us the lentil soup, and after a second or two, Sebouh Baboug would remove the white handkerchief from his pocket so discretely and would start blowing his nose. It was as if he would keep all the fluids of his nose for this happy occasion.

At times, this would go on for two minutes, or three, with urgent breaks in between. If I dared look at him, I would be amazed at how meticulously he folded the handkerchief, looking for dry spots, and squeezing in the correct places. Meme would nudge him, urging him to finally realize that it is somewhat inappropriate to empty the contents of your nose right before a precious meal. Well, it always worked wonders. I would lose my appetite. Tsoler and Mama also. Baba would try to rearrange the cutlery. Poor Meme would feel devastated, cursing her luck for having chosen him, out of all the suitors who had asked for her hand in marriage back in their village. We would all quietly wait until Sebouh Baboug was done eating. Many times, I tried to feel sorry for him. When he was not reading the daily newspaper that he usually borrowed from our cousins and never bought himself, he would tell us how he grew up in an orphanage in the Greek Island of Corfu as a child. At some point, I felt guilty for hating him as I listened to his stories about how his parents and uncles were killed by the Turks—one by one, during the Armenian Genocide: "Mortesin irents, [They slaughtered them]" he would repeat as he would fight tears. Even at 85, still an orphan looking for his parents, he searched for that smell—the unique smell of their home back in the real homeland.



In September 1982, just a few days after the assassination of President-elect Basheer Gemayel, when we could not leave our homes as Beirut was boiling with the despair of bombs, threats, and massacres, Sebouh Baboug asked my mom for a dermatologist's name. He had been talking about the wart on the left side of his forehead for over a month. All of a sudden, the wart started bothering him, as he was convinced that the wart was growing bigger and bigger. "Hars [bride]," he would address my mom. "Please take me to the hospital. I need to have this wart removed."

My mom, ever so patiently would urge him that with the first hope of a ceasefire, she would take him to the hospital, and it would be a matter of minutes. "It's a simple procedure," she would explain to him. As the days went by, Sebouh Baboug's wart bothered him so much, that he only talked about his wart. He would start with his stories about Corfu and all of a sudden he would switch back to his wart. He would measure the wart, try to scratch it, look into different mirrors, and ask us to comment on the size of the wart. Meme would run out of tricks trying to divert his attention. And then on a Sunday, after having obsessed about his wart for over a month, he kept asking my parents for a pair of scissors.

He told my dad that he would cut it out, just like an umbilical cord, and throw it out of the window. My dad tried to talk sense into him, and then partly from exhaustion and partly from years of pent-up frustration, my mom handed him the largest pair of scissors that we had. We all waited impatiently as he walked into the bathroom, holding the scissors with his experienced tailor's hand, and locked the door behind him. Tsoler and I giggled as Mom hushed us and urged us to behave. I imagined him walking out, all covered in blood, and Meme finally the free widow-to-be crying tears of duty; or perhaps we would call an ambulance and he would bleed to death while waiting for the ambulance. After fifteen minutes of supposed self-imposed surgery, Sebouh Baboug walked out with the scissors in his hand. Just like a child, who was done with his tantrum, he smiled. The wart still sat on the side of his forehead, more stubborn than him, and barely visible. "As megrade kor e" [This pair of scissors is 'blind']. I remember Mom and Meme exchanging glances of victory. I remember Mom telling Tsoler: "Mer dune pos, ur khent me ga hos." [Our house is a hole, where all crazy ones gather]. Baba nodding invited him to the salon, to discuss Armenian history and the final days of General Antranig—their favorite national hero. I think it was the only way to calm him down.

As I walk into the pale corridor of the seventh floor of the American University Hospital, the smell of Caelyx Chemotherapy takes a grip on my whole existence. Many people say that chemotherapy doesn't smell; but I know for a fact that it smells of hopes and wishes gone wrong; rotten images of how a life was meant to be lived. I think of all those stubborn cancer cells killing my mother slowly. Sitting inside of her where I was one day sleeping so carelessly. Can't I negotiate with them? Can't I sit and pat them on the back and beg them to stay quiet for a while? Chemotherapy merely buys time . . . a bit of low-quality time. Mom is in Room 710, the last room at the end of that long and dull corridor. My dad tells me that I was born in Room 709. We have lived here for the past two months. On the wall facing Mom's bed, my sister has placed a small wooden painting. It reads: "Believe in Miracles." She likes these trinkets that exude of hope. The nurses know me, so they give me shampoo and extra food. Sometimes, they even give me a sleeping pill. But I can't sleep.

A year after the 2006 war, Mom's cancer is back and with a vengeance. Her oncologist comes in at 6:45 a.m. every morning. I get up at 6:15 am, check if Mom is still breathing, wipe her forehead with a damp towel, and then go to the bathroom and wash up. I also put on the thickest layer of Mac concealer which is perfect cover-up especially since I have inherited the dark circles under my eyes from my dad; Mom's skin is flawless. Then I apply a light blue eye-liner, with just a tint of bronze blush. These are the three pieces of make-up that I have carried with me from home. I look less zombie-like. Mornings when I wake up from my sleepless night, my hands are numb, all the way up to my elbows—a manifestation of anxiety that will stay with me for years to come. The numbness at times turns into a tingling sensation, pins and needles, burning, pulling. Every day at 6:45 am, Mom's oncologist walks in, chic in a polo shirt evident under his white coat, still wearing the Hariri pin that became so popular after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik el Hariri in 2005. Almost a year and a half after this tragedy, he still tells my mom that even the richest people can die just like that, purposelessly. I guess he wants to motivate her. To somehow reignite the passion of life in her. My mom, though, insists that she wants a physician like Jack Kevorkian to help her. The oncologist has told me repeatedly that Mom will live between six months to 24 or 36—that I have to be strong at the end and let her go because it will not be peaceful. Her lungs will fill up with fluid and she will probably feel like she is drowning or suffocating.

I have repeatedly counted the months and the years. How many months are in a year? So, 24 means two years and 36 means three. Only. I have prayed each month that the tumor marker CA-125 does not go up, that we get a sign she is responding well to chemotherapy.

We have tried wheat grass juice and mangosteen in kilos. Baba grows wheatgrass on cotton, and then in soil. He nurtures them and sings positive energy into them, but the smell of the wheatgrass makes me gag. Determined, my dad wakes up every morning, religiously cutting the wheatgrass and offering the juice to my mom. She hates it, I know. She does it for him; to make him happy. Highschool sweethearts, she cannot break his heart now. She has already crossed the bridge though. She is alive, but has decided to die very soon. If not very soon, then sooner than expected. She wants to die. It is a choice that she has made. Jack Kevorkian—she waits for him. She is not scared of death. Not anymore. But we haven't accepted it yet. So she hangs around for us until we are more familiar with the idea of (un)expected departures.

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There is a quiet, at times resistant, hopefully harmonious, but mostly elusive moment between light and darkness where light succumbs into the lap of dark masses of unknown nothingness . . . and then there is the surrendering and the letting go. Usually lasting up to a couple of minutes, nature takes on a darker coat, quite foggy at the beginning, but by and by thicker and gloomier. I'm always in awe of that last moment between light and darkness; the very last one that either voluntarily or involuntarily has to turn the transparent ease of daylight into a more mysterious gown of nighttime. I remember almost 38 years ago, a classmate and I promised each other that we would keep our eyes fixed on the sun as it was setting, in order to catch that moment between light and darkness.

For two weeks, every day, we tried diligently, but then somehow, we always managed to miss that specific moment. We would either get caught up in watching other kids on the playground run after the ball, or engage in easy conversation, or just . . . We never caught that moment. It seems to me now that had I seized that moment, things would have been easier, that I wouldn't keep on losing things and people I love.

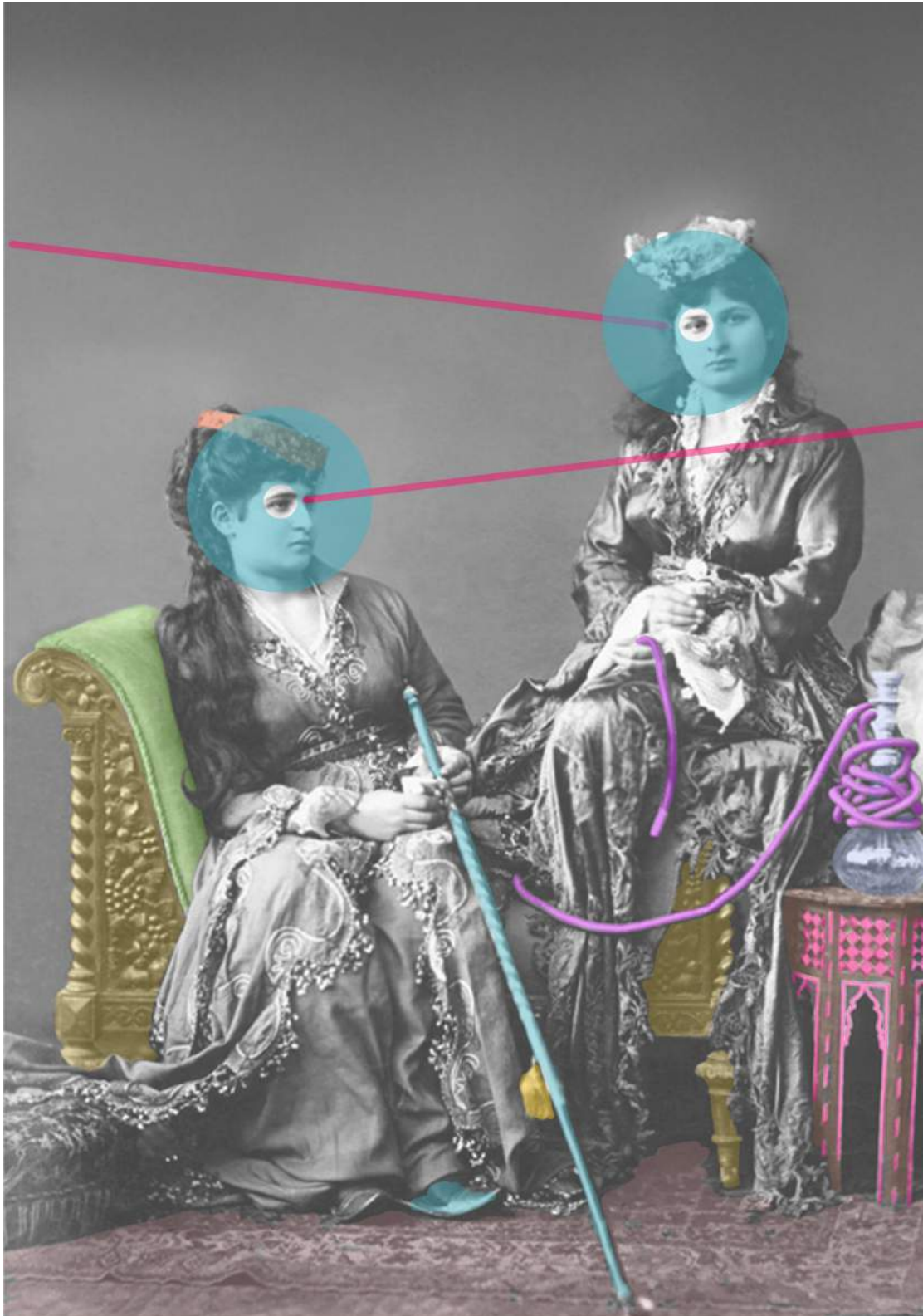


Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian is a writer, an educator, and a storyteller. She grew up in Lebanon witnessing the civil war, countless assassinations, and explosions that still happen. An educator at heart, she has been teaching English Language and Literature for the past 18 years in different universities in Lebanon. She loves working with teenagers, empowering them and coaching them to become better versions of themselves. Tired of writing to herself, she started sharing her writing with others after the Beirut port blasts. She is currently working on her memoir which includes stories about growing up in a multiple-trauma land, being a caregiver to both her parents, and taboo issues associated with body image and mental health. She has edited two books and is currently working on the third one, along with some translation projects.



*"Return to Shushi" Armen Sayar 2022*

# Joanna Kambourian



*"The Sisters"*

*(Digital Collage/Drawing using archival photograph) 2022*



*"Tell me..." (Digital Drawing of original screenprint) 2016*



*"Wolf Girl Twins (Roar!)" (Digital Collage from personal photo archives) 2019*





*"Two Birds" (Digital Drawing) 2022*

Joanna Kambourian is an Australian designer, printmaker and visual artist of Armenian heritage. She is a first class Honors graduate of the Visual Arts program at Southern Cross University, Lismore and also studied printmaking and artists books at Pratt Institute, New York.

Throughout her creative practice, she explores, experiences and examines the idea of 'hybrid hyphenations' within cultural and social identity.

Joanna continues to document an ongoing journey, a search for identity and belonging from a post-colonial perspective that crosses generations and encompasses the diasporic experience. Her work illustrates this complex heritage through a multi-disciplinary practice and celebrates her SWANA ancestry through contemporary cultural depictions.



# In the Midst of Myths

## Harut Akopyan

The forgotten tale  
is intuitive  
The modern-day life

oral tradition

In the midst of myths  
the stories we forge  
forgoing the past  
cannibalism

friends and our nation?

Enemies roving  
in sluggish engines  
individually

on the same station

depart with tethered  
love and hate wagons  
Arriving bedecked  
boundaries apart

holy creation?

Empires and Peoples  
singing and dancing  
Storied history

father's gestation

Our collective pride  
sailing and flying  
shooting and dying  
pass on to living

Civilization?

Harut Akopyan was born in Yerevan and now lives in Los Angeles, California. In college, he studied filmmaking and screenwriting. In his spare time, he dabbles in poetry and writing essays. Having played the game from a young age, Harut is also an accomplished chess player. Although he has a diverse set of hobbies and interests, his Armenian-American experience and identity cannot be detached from his viewpoint and writing.

# Mikayla Kurkjian

The following pieces are the result of a semester-long project to incorporate Armenian cultural heritage into the public soundscape. *"Armenian 10/8 Medley"* features the melodies of Yerevani Siroon Aghchig and Sari Siroon Yar, two of the many Armenian folk songs in the unique 10/8 meter.

*"Tamzara"* is an arrangement of Aghvor Aghchik in two stylistic variations to blend the sounds of kef music and traditional carillon music.

## Armenian 10/8 Medley

Armenian Folk, Arr. Mikayla Kurkjian

**Allegro**

Yerevani Siroon Aghchig

The musical score is written for piano in 10/8 time. It consists of five systems of music. The first system is marked 'Allegro' and 'Yerevani Siroon Aghchig'. The second system starts at measure 7. The third system starts at measure 13. The fourth system is marked 'Sari Siroon Yar' and starts at measure 19. The fifth system starts at measure 25. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, and *mp*. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fifth system.

2

31

Musical score for measures 31-36. The piece is in 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody of quarter notes: G4 (quarter rest), A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

37

Musical score for measures 37-42. The piece is in 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody of quarter notes: G4 (quarter rest), A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2. The key signature has one sharp (F#). A dynamic marking of *mf/f* is present in measure 39.

43

Musical score for measures 43-48. The piece is in 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody of quarter notes: B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes first and second endings for measures 47 and 48.

[Listen here](#)



# Tamzara

## Aghvor Aghchik

Armenian Folk  
arr. Mikayla Kurkjian

$\text{♩} = 116$  Upbeat, dancelike A

*mf*

*simile*

6

B

12

C

18

24

D Flowing, lyrical

*mp*

2

34

39 **E** *mf*

45 **F**

50

55 *f*

## [Listen here](#)

Mikayla Kurkjian is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan, where she studied electrical engineering and was a member of the carillon studio for two semesters. She is an avid lacemaker and embroiderer and strives to preserve and share Armenian needlework. You can see her work on Instagram @digin.haiganoush.

# Sara Clamage

*"Yet We Are Thirsty" (Digital assemblage, 2022)*

My Armenian ancestors come from one place—Chomaklou in southern Keysari. 'The world is a sea, yet we are thirsty' resonates with me on many levels. This layered image is intimately personal, representing both the wealth of knowledge I'm blessed to have about my family and the quiet, empty spaces within those stories.

Almost all the images here are original to my family. The photo and text come from refugee paperwork granting my great-great-aunt passage to the United States from Athens. The cursive is a tracing of the handwriting that allowed my great-grandfather to accompany her. The steamship ticket behind them is the one that carried them both to New York in May 1920. The image of the sea is my own, a photo of my beloved Atlantic, the bitter/sweet conveyor of so many ancestors.

Stitching it all together is a traced and exploded detail from a piece of Marash embroidery that can be found at the Armenian Museum of America.

Together this assembly of images and symbols evokes the love and sorrow of knowing our families' history—the desert, the sea, the closeness and the distance, an abundance that leaves us thirsty for what is missing, and the fastidious project of preserving the fragments that remain.

In loving memory of Sona Keyishian Ekizian, 1929–2022



Sara Clamage (she/her) is an artist and illustrator from Boston. Working with paint, assemblage, and digital illustration her work explores the connections between nature, self, culture, place, history, and belonging. Sara's work can be seen on social media (@sclam\_art) and on her website (sclamageart.squarespace.com).



# Jewels

## Meghri Sarkissian

is it the emeralds in your eyes,  
emboldened by my fervor  
entrancing me hypnotically?  
or the crystals dripping from your lips,  
wrapping around my throat  
in vicelike desire?

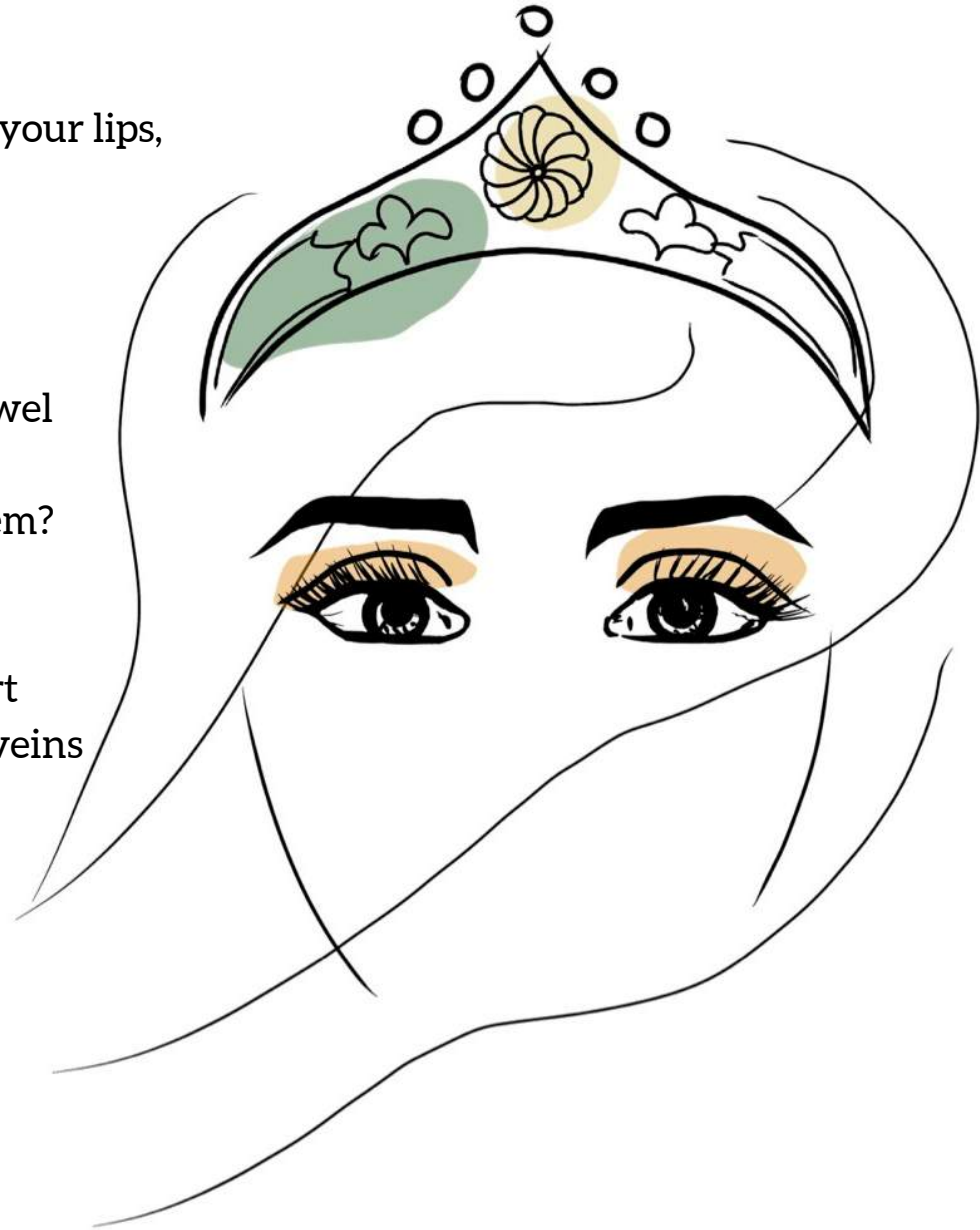
I have fallen for your poetry  
for each of your words is a jewel

but to whom do you offer them?

is it the pain in my chest,  
that dulls the beat of my heart  
the dusty gems that clog my veins  
grating beneath my skin  
leaving ashy remnants,  
memories of deception?

and yet, blinded by the shine  
to trust without waver  
to love without fear

I place your jewels upon my crown.





Meghri Sarkissian was born on the island of Cyprus to an Armenian family. She moved to the United States at a young age and grew up in Los Angeles, where she learned to speak English through books and storytelling. Sarkissian developed a passion for the deep sensitivity found in Armenian art and worked to incorporate that into her own writing. In 2018, she self-published a novel, *Lake of Sighs*—a fictional story inspired by the Akhtamar legend of Armenia. In 2020, she wrote a flash fiction story about her mother’s experience in northern Iran—which won first place in a contest hosted by *The Composite Review*. Sarkissian continues to write about the strength and richness of the Armenian culture, as well as the struggles of the Armenian feminist community and the transgenerational trauma of the Armenian diaspora.

# Masis and Sis, my love

Niko Petrosyan

Jealousy is a trait of persons who have lost  
Our world earlier was sea to sea  
Stay burning, my love  
So our grandmother's eye will see  
Every nation's tree has been shaken  
Only the sovereign bloom again  
Never forgive, never forget  
But no more dwelling  
Less chattering, more achieving  
Time is of the essence  
Now is time for excelling  
Let us learn from our past lives  
The lives we see in our mother's eyes  
May we adopt those experiences to recover  
The Two Sisters restored to her Mother

Niko Petrosyan is a photographer and songwriter from Seattle, Washington. His art and music is heavily influenced by his Armenian heritage. His ancestors hail from Van and Ashan Village in Artsakh. He is a great-grandson of an Armenian Genocide survivor and son of a Sumgait Pogrom survivor. Their blood lives on through his two beautiful little girls. You can find his photography and other posts on Instagram at @nikoyanphoto.

# Mahout

## When Hannibal Went over the Alps 218 BC

Peter Hajinian

If the Romans, or the mountain, or the mercenaries didn't kill Hannibal, I was going to. It was crazy to take these war elephants over the Alps. They were from North Africa, from Carthage, just like I was, and I was not fit for crossing these high mountain passes. I told Hannibal: You asked me to care for your elephants, but I can't do that with all this cold! His only response was: It's so crazy, it might just work.

Surus was Hannibal's favorite elephant. Nearly every day he'd come back to inspect him. Hannibal might lavish attention on one of them, but all the war elephants were like my children. I had raised and trained them from calves. I taught them to fight. I taught them to swim. And now I was teaching them to find their footing on icy, rocky passes. To stay away from cliffs. To huddle in their stalls at night for warmth. Nobody taught me how to do this. I had to figure it out. I wish I was better. One elephant, Pinky, was ill. Two were injured from slipping on the ice. And Mago went over a cliff when he took a wrong step. I vowed I wouldn't lose another after that. I told Hannibal we're a long way from the Mediterranean beaches, we need to take it slower, but he wouldn't listen. He wanted to take Rome, and he'll do it no matter what the cost. Except Surus.

Feed was low. After catching some mercenaries stealing our hay for their horses, I slept in the cart. I told them again and again that even though elephants couldn't talk like us, they felt and fought like we did. To steal their food was the same as stealing food from another soldier, but it never got through their dense skulls. I gave Surus a larger cut than the others so Hannibal wouldn't chastise me, but I could see poor Pinky's ribs.

I had to do something. I stuffed my overcoat with hay and threw a blanket over the lump. I slipped through the sleeping camp, shuffling so I wouldn't leave footprints in the snow, and raided the quartermaster's stores. That night, my elephants ate vegetables and grain. Pinky even got some cheese.

Hannibal arrived at dawn to inspect Surus. He checked the animal's tusks and teeth, climbed on his back and paraded around, shouting about how Rome wasn't built in a day but would fall by lunch—not that exact day, it was just an expression. He wasn't that crazy.

Mahout, he said to me, you need to feed the elephants better. Surus almost bit my hand off.

I'd already complained about the mercenaries stealing hay, so all I could say was: Yes, of course.

That night, I stuffed my coat again and snuck out to the commissary tent. I took off my red and purple striped linen shirt and packed it with bread, nuts, and fruits. The wind stung my skin, but the stars dazzled so much more than in Carthage. It gave me what I needed to make it back. I spread the food among the elephants as evenly as I could, pulled the shirt over my chapped skin, and watched them eat. Their eyes glittered. They hadn't looked that happy since we went swimming in Gaul. They ate everything and snorted up the crumbs.

When Hannibal came to inspect Surus the next morning, the aide de camp had to wake me. I was hot to the touch but couldn't wrap myself up with enough layers.

Finally, Hannibal said, you're treating my war elephants right.

I could only stop shivering long enough to wipe my nose. Many of the troops were suffering, and the blowing snow meant we didn't get far that day. We pitched camp early and set up extra fires. The men murmured that the campaign was cursed.



The elephants didn't complain, they just huddled together. I caught a mercenary in our haycart but was too ill to fight him. When the fires went out, I crept under the stars to the quartermaster's stores. There was no bread, but there was wine. At first it stung the elephants' trunks, but once it took effect they rollicked back and forth in their stalls. I took a swig and felt a little better, so I took a few more.

The next day I was in a bad way. Luckily, Hannibal didn't come to inspect Surus. We marched on. The elephants, moving slower than usual, prodded me along. By the time we made camp for the night, I didn't have the energy to find them food. I gave them what hay was left and buried myself under their saddles in the empty haycart.

The wind picked up and the mountain passes got more treacherous. A few of the mercenaries succumbed to the elements, and more than a few of the regular army. I was so ill I didn't notice how thin and sickly Pinky had gotten until he laid down in a tight mountain pass and didn't get back up. His ribs were clearly showing but not moving, and his thin hair frosted with ice, but it was his eyes. Wide open but dull. Snow was blowing in my face, and I suddenly couldn't swallow. The mercenaries cleared the poor creature so the troops could continue on.

That night the mercenaries lit a fire and cooked Pinky. I wept in his empty stall, praying to Tanit there would be no more. My elephants were tender with me, Surus even patted me a few times with his trunk, but as their grunts and groans of hunger pains grew louder, they poked and prodded me to get up. A mercenary came in to see if I had hay for the horses. The elephants reared up and trumpeted, tossed their heads, bared their tusks and threatened to charge. I pushed the mercenary out, warning him not to come back. When I turned around, Surus was right there to push me out, too.

I went to the mercenary's tents. I told them I'd get them hay if they gave me vegetables and bread. They laughed at me and tossed the last of the elephant bones.

It was a bitter, cold night. Delirious with fever, I thought my hair was on fire. I went back to the elephant tent, but I could hear them grumbling and knew I wasn't welcome until I had something to eat. I slipped into Hannibal's royal camp and loaded up with as much royal cheese, fruits, and bread as I could carry. I even found the strength to grab two amphorae of wine.

The elephants feasted. They lifted me up and set me on Surus' back and paraded me around the tent like I was Hannibal himself, but on each lap all I could see were the empty stalls where Pinky and Mago once slept.

The next day, Hannibal called a special assembly, addressing us from atop a well-fed Surus. Rumors swirled. I couldn't stop my rotting teeth from chattering.

Hannibal said there was a thief in the ranks. He didn't shout it, he didn't growl it, he just mentioned it, but the crowd reacted as though he had accused each one of them personally. The mercenaries spat that it wasn't them. The regular army announced it wasn't them, either. The quartermaster said that he too had been robbed, and that one night he'd seen the man.

A hush fell over the crowd. Hannibal asked the quartermaster to identify him. The quartermaster said that the man wasn't wearing a shirt, but he did have a bundle that was striped red and purple. One of the mercenaries, who I recognized as a hay-thief, came over and tugged my sleeve free from the blanket I'd wrapped around myself. He held it up in the air and shouted. The mercenaries and regulars jeered. By the insults hurled at me, you'd have thought I was a Roman. They mocked and sneered, called my mother things only a soldier would say, threatened to toss me off the Alps.

Thunder echoed off ice and rock. I saw Hannibal sprawled out on the snow, the quartermaster and other generals helping him up. Then all I could see was the back end of Surus. I was out of the wind, surrounded by a citadel of elephants. Closing my eyes, I leaned against the rough, chapped skin. The heat melted my frozen beard. I stopped shivering long enough to dream of Mediterranean beaches.

I called out: Hannibal, I think Surus would like to see the beach.

You ride on Surus, Hannibal shouted to me from the other side of my defenders. Ride on his back until you're well enough to walk, and someone get Mahout a coat.

That night we dined with Hannibal. Me and all the elephants. It was the last meal he had with Surus, and the last time I saw my elephants healthy.

Peter Hajinian is a writer living in Minneapolis. His writing has been featured in HyeBred, Litro, and other online literary magazines, and in 2021 he was a part of the International Armenian Literary Society's 2021 Mentorship Program and Emerging Writer Showcase. This piece is a part of a larger collection of short stories about the people not talked about in history class: chumps.



*"Looking at the Cup" Ali Cat.*

# Ali Cat.

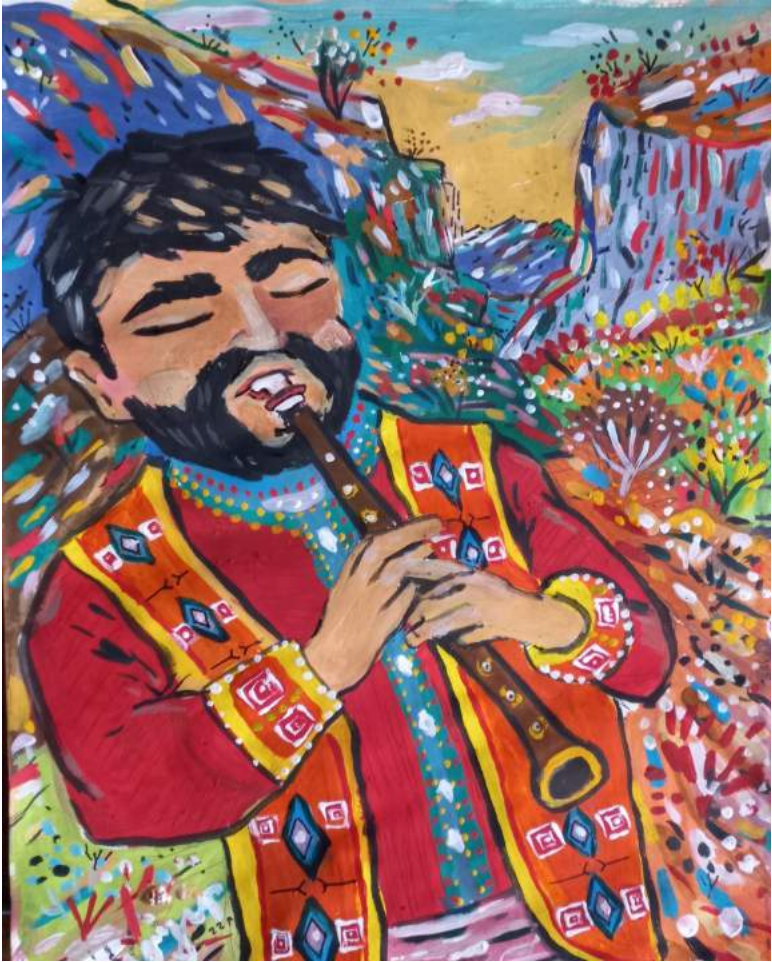
"Our promise"



Ali Cat. is an artist and printmaker living in Portland, Oregon and produces her work under the name Entangled Roots Press. Their prints mingle the literal and metaphorical to illuminate and comment upon the world around us. Relief, screen, and letterpress prints span from the carnage of clear-cuts to the beauty of people's movements. Ali's prints pull from ancestral herstories and push towards liberatory futures; entangling lessons from gardens, symbols in coffee cups, woven threads from Armenia and Euskal Herria, to the printed page.

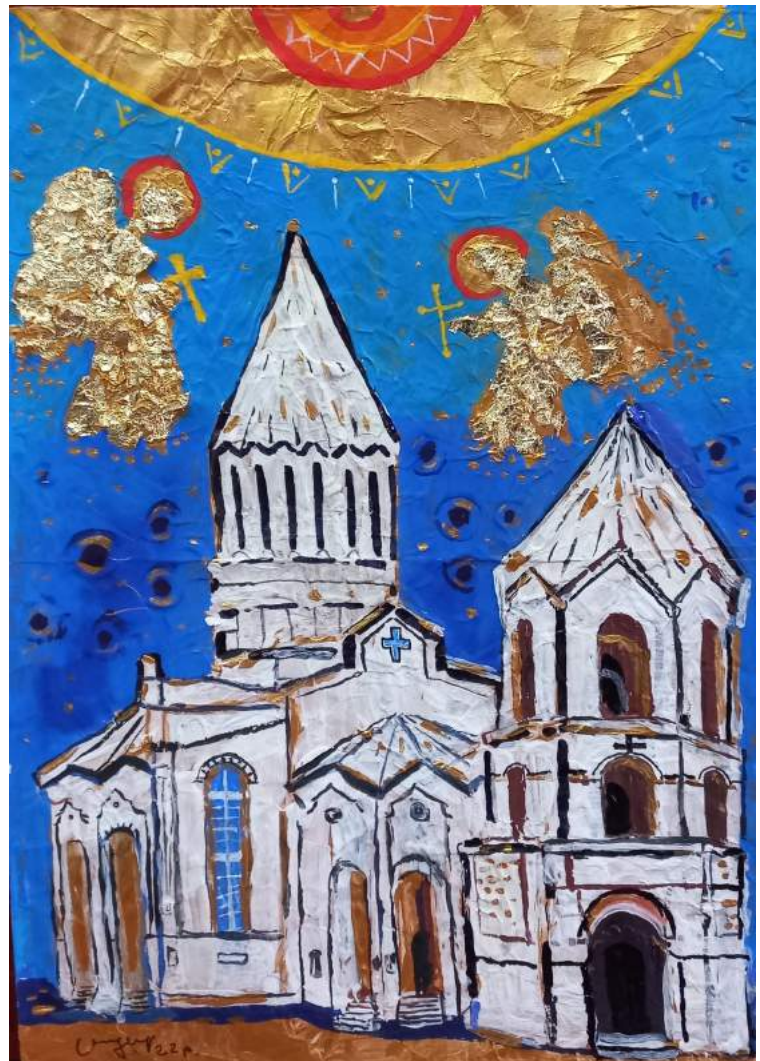


# Armen Sayar



*"Return"*

*"Salvation Shushi"*



Armen Sayar is an artist raised and living in Shushi until he was uprooted in November 2020. All his works represent Artsakh.

Find and purchase his work on Instagram @sayarart





*"Artsakh Getashen"*



# Jane Partizpanyan

## Solace

I'm walking down a valley  
With tangled brush and rivers  
Once I touch forbidden waters  
My body starts to shiver

Water pours before me  
Under my tired feet  
It provides me solace  
From the emptiness and heat

I kneel down for a drink  
To satisfy my thirst  
But nothing cannot satisfy  
No, nothing on this earth

Alas, you have gone missing  
So far from my view  
How can I live another day  
If I cannot have you?

I keep trudging forth  
Looking for relief  
But I cannot find it  
In this never-ending heat

# Shaken by the wind

Flagrant sores cover your body  
You rip your skin to find the pain  
Your cheeks a rouge so apt and gaudy  
You peck and pull, but all in vain

Tell me where the pain now lives  
In the flowers that weave your heart?  
The darkness that only knows to give?  
Within a painting of Asian folk art?

Even the stars can all be ravaged  
You have taught me this one thing  
The human heart can be turned savage  
Then it melts and turns to spring

The wealthy soil can become fruitless  
Like an unbecoming breeze  
Like a feeling dull and rootless  
A wind that tussles all the leaves

But I'll carry every flower  
That weaves within your heart  
In the chaos there is power  
A light summer shower  
A cross upon a tower  
A pain that can't devour



Jane Partizpanyan is a B.A. student at California State University, Northridge. She works as a contributing writer to the *Armenian Weekly* and the *Daily Sundial*. She is also a PR coordinator at Agency 398 and a published poet, with her most recent publication soon to be featured in *The Northridge Review* literary journal. Her Armenian heritage plays a huge part in her identity as she is constantly inspired by Armenian artists and writers of the past.



*"Black Wave" Sevag Armenian*



# Please Don't Use the "D-Word"

## Gayane Parsegova

*This piece is dedicated to my Great-Grandmother. Emphasis on great, because she always made that a point to everyone we crossed paths with.*

Your daughter feeds you in the nursing home.

She's so excited and optimistic to see you.

"Mama," she says. "It's Karina and Gayana,"

Silence.

A blank stare from my Great-Grandmother.

I watch my grandmother feeding her own mother  
with love intertwined and heartbreak in her eyes.

We continue speaking in Russian, hoping she reacts.

Hoping she smiles

at our familiar melody.

Hoping she says

one of our names.

Hoping she remembers us,

embracing us.

My grandmother, holding back tears,

looks at me and says, "Look Gayana, she's eating well today, she's doing okay."

"Okay."

Time.

I wish I would have appreciated the "okay" times with you more.

Your hands are always wrapped around my leg,  
while we sit on your noisy leather couch.  
Nothing about you has changed since I was a child.  
I grow older, but you remain the same.  
You've worn the same ring and bracelet on your right hand for almost 30 years.  
You hold me tightly.  
And periodically look at me to tell me to keep eating and that the tea is still too hot to  
drink.  
We sit in silence  
listening to one another's breathing  
as if our beating hearts are in sync.  
"Wheel of Fortune" plays in the background.  
You hold me and feed me.  
That's how you tell me you love me.  
How you have *always* told me you loved me.

When you hold me, I still feel like I am a child.  
That same child you held when I was 8.  
That same child you held when I was 18.  
And that same child, I still am to you, at 28.

Time.  
I wish, we had more.

Gayane Parsegova is a first-generation American-Armenian, with parents from the former USSR. She is a recent San Diego State University MA graduate in Comparative Literature with an emphasis in Russian language/literature, Communism, Genocide & Massacre studies, and the Bildungsroman genre. More recently, her work has been published in the 2019 edition of *Pacific Review's* "Hallucinations" issue, and issue 8 of *Hyebred Magazine* in 2020. Prior to the pandemic, she was a lecturer at SDSU for the English, History, and Native American Studies Departments. She currently lives in San Diego, CA where she continues to write after midnight when the world is asleep, and she is wide awake.

# Araks Sahakyan



*"Olive tree or stories of a father"*

*watercolor markers on bristol extra smooth 250g/m2 paper, 42 x 59,4 cm, 2021.*

Without borders and in constant movement, Araks Sahakyan is a multidisciplinary artist who combines multiculturalism in all times and in all languages. Video, performance, installations, dance and theatre, music, drawing, painting, screen printing and even bookbinding and woodmaking . . . no medium or know-how can resist her. Diverting symbols and mythologies, as well as ancient craft techniques, the artist puts memory and intimacy, the body and politics at the centre of a pop, colourful and lively work. Migratory flows, flags, identities and transmission, borders and languages become for her materials in their own right and reflect the upheavals of the current world. And for good reason, this tireless globetrotter in her thirties, curious about everything, and polyglot, has already lived several lives.

Born in 1990 in Armenia, raised in Spain, she chose France as her elected land to shine in the field of languages and fine arts at INALCO, La Sorbonne and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de Paris-Cergy (ENSAPC). Noticed during the video program of the Jeune Creation in 2020, then selected for the 65th edition of the Salon de Montrouge, everything is linked for her in 2021: a residency at the Drawing Factory in Paris, then the "Paper Art" exhibition at the CODA Museum in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands, and finally, with the support of the FoRTE Île-de-France grant, her first solo exhibition at the YGREC art center in Aubervilliers in France.

~





*"Autumn self-portrait"*

*watercolor markers on bristol extra smooth 250g/m2 paper, 42 free sheets, 224 x 120 cm, 2021.*

Very involved in handmade carpets, Araks Sahakyan initiated her first “paper carpets” in 2018: felt pen drawings where everyday scenes intertwine with ancestral carpet patterns. Stored in a box or displayed on the wall, these works, made with free sheets, reveal, in bright and joyful colours, the tensions between East and West. While real carpet projects have recently been developed with artisans from Armenia, in 2022 Araks Sahakyan has obtained a residency at the TAMAT Musée de la Tapisserie et des Arts Textiles in Tournai, Belgium, and participates at the collective exhibition “SILK” at the Giudecca Art District in Venice, Italy.

Finally, thanks to the Transverse Prize by ADAGP & Freelens & Editions “Sometimes,” she is working with photographer Rebecca Topakian on a double carpet and edition project entitled “Vordan Karmir” which will be presented at the Salon Polycopies in Paris at the end of 2022.

Like a citizen of the world, Araks Sahakyan evolves on several territories, ignoring aesthetic, disciplinary or geographical limits.

Instagram: @arakssakakian

Website: [www.arakssahakyan.com](http://www.arakssahakyan.com)

Anaïd Demir





*"Floating carpet, Floating body or Medusas of the Mediterranean"*  
watercolor markers on bristol extra smooth 250g/m2 paper, 8 free sheets, 57.2 x 80.80  
cm, 2021



# Jewels should not be disturbed sometimes...

## Béatrice Denise Chahine

These jewels, they appeared in a row, a shining column of rainbows to her, as the wind around the glades of grass whispered, lulling her nearer.

Are you thirsty for this treasure?

Do you dare?

Should the columns shudder, there will be an avalanche of memoirs, words no longer one page but an epic worthy of its name..... and she would cave to the knowledge, which never cease to be...

Maybe not, she thought.

From the mountains to the sea, wouldn't the trees not withstand this avalanche? And the ancient stones. And the animals. And even you, wind.... Friend, be still. Listen.

The wind stopped speaking, its continuous whispers ceasing. The columns, swaying before, stilled quiet.

There. Do you hear? said she.

The jewels glistened, treasures glittering in their own shadows like faraway stars in the night skies. Everything was motionless, even the wind.... No whispers, no stirring, no action, save those who needed to.. Was it worth disturbing ?

No.

She smiled. You see, I dared. We can learn by many paths. We can leave the jewels alone. They will always exist. And so she continued to gaze upon the columns of rainbows, unperturbed.

Béatrice Denise Chahine is a writer who wanders with a photo camera. Born and raised in New York – New Jersey to a Lebanese (Beyrouthine and half Armenian-Catholic) father and a French mother, she only went once to Lebanon, recently, through Armenia, where she was for 5 months. At 18, she left the US "home" for France for university and has since searched far and wide for "home," words, stories (fiction, history or other), and a good hot chocolate. Can be currently found in Strasbourg.



*"Lebanon A Revolt" Sevag Armenian*

# Sevag Armenian



*"Blue Hair" (above)*

*"Manhattan II" (below)*



Born in 1976 in Paris, Sevag lives and works in Beirut. His preferred medium is painting.

In his compositions, space is constructed by multiple interwoven layers. Implicitly, supersaturated puzzles give birth to labyrinthine and abstract figures.

Color constructions are sedimented by successive layers and sketch a pictorial language where uncertain figures sometimes emerge between geometric figures. The line often becomes more violent and musical, more rock and roll, as if each of his work is a transcription of a rock concert.





*"Beyrouth-Paris" (above)*

*"2050 " (below)*



From beneath the clashing of black, red, blue, and green, emerges a little music that suggests intimate and collective narratives. Scattered signs that are sometimes more explicit in his collages: a photograph stuck in a corner, a magazine article or newspaper fragment, "lost media items," Lebanese or Armenian stories. Sevag Armenian has been developing his work since his stay in Paris in the 90s and 2000s, where he initiated his work in 1991.



# Dolma is My Armenianness

Christina Kevorkov

I'll never forget that one Christmas Eve when Mom made us fall in love with dolma. Papa was working, as always, but he promised us he would be home before midnight. We were baking shortbread sugar cookies to match the ambiance of our unlively neighborhood. We used those cheap, metal cookie cutters to carve out dozens of perfectly sharp-edged snowflakes and gingerbread men. We left our tiny fingerprints in the dough. We let the chemicals of the crimson icing stain our tongues. We dipped our fingers in the vanilla frosting, splattering hues of red and green across our mother's embroidered tablecloth. We shared the sugar cookies with some of our friendlier neighbors, the ones who actually opened their doors. We managed to cure our boredom for approximately two hours. We got hungry.

Mom cleared the table. She replaced the canisters of tie-dyed frosting with a big jar of delicate emerald grape leaves. Her movements were careful, yet so swift. The joy in her eyes as she tucked the sugary icing into the very back of our dusty cabinet said everything. The poignant smell of garlic and olive oil quickly erased any hints of the buttery fragrances of our sugar cookies. We were disappointed with these drastic changes, but then became fascinated with how the heavy aroma of the grape leaves intertwined with the curliness of our disheveled locks. It was something that vanilla-flavored icing couldn't ever do.

We watched as Mom switched the *Home Alone* CD soundtrack to Aram Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance." There was some whining at first, but the staccatissimo of the bells and xylophones of this captivating Armenian song made us forget everything about the overplayed Christmas songs in that overrated Hollywood movie. There was something so special about this timeless, antsy dance that made us jump on the couches with puckish grins on our faces.

The fake crystal beads on our chandelier in the kitchen were shaking from the thunderous sounds of the percussive dance as our feet bounced against the wooden floors. In this moment of absolute frenzy, we weren't bored for the first time in a long time. We were discovering our Armenianness—something that had been buried from us for generations. Our chaotic jumps and twists and turns against the couches weren't just out of pure joy. It was the Kocharis, Shalaxos, Ververis, and all the other traditional Armenian dances that were never taught to us. The movements of our ancestors were always a part of us as we danced to Khachaturian's most memorable composition on a not so lonely Christmas eve. After, when we needed some oxygen and water to calm us down from nonstop dancing, Mom changed her reindeer sweater into a blue floral robe covered with deep oil stains. Our exhaustion made us hungry.

We were hungry to learn what dolma meant. We were hungry for its roots. Whether it was Armenians or Turks or Greeks calling it *Dolma*, *Dolmathe*, *Dolmadakia*, they were all variations on a theme unbounded by one place of origin, one distinctive taste, and one village of ancestors.

I understand how it is simple and complex. Mom got misty as she remembered the dolma of her childhood. She remembered the 27 years of her life spent in Azerbaijan. She remembered the ease of wrapping the tender grape leaves, the ones that never smelled too commercial and acidic. She remembers when there was common ground. She took a leap by telling us this story without words. Her bare immigrant hands did all the speaking. We observed with deep curiosity as we intuitively knew this moment would satiate our longtime wonderings about the roots of our Armenianness. It is past and present. It is grief and joy. It is us and everyone.

I remember watching her as she patiently flattened out the curves and edges of the oily grape leaves as they glimmered in the shadow of her fake crystal chandelier in our stuffy Armenian kitchen. Her hands were always busy. She kneaded the ground beef with care as she mixed in generous spoonfuls of basmati rice without any measurements. Her hands were covered in olive oil, lemon juice, minced garlic, basil, mint, salt, pepper, and everything else in our kitchen cabinets.

She sculpted the beef mixture into small circles without worrying about how the seasoning seeped into the dry cracks of her unmoisturized hands. She knew we were overwhelmed with joy as it was finally time to make the emerald leaves hug the soft beef. My sister and I sat at the table convinced that we were born to be professional dolma chefs. We quickly forgot about the sugar cookies and the colorful icing. We concentrated on slowly wrapping the leaves as Mom did, ensuring there was no breathing room for the dolmas. Mom fixed our batch with her perpetual desire of rebelling against the laws of physics as she fought to create very resilient, airtight Armenian dolmas. They were placed into a round silver pot to boil for the next few hours.

The rhythmic, immortal genius of Aram Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance" kept filling the room with so much love, laughter, and tears. There were moments when our jumping off the couches left us with bruises on our knees, but it was worth the pain. It was a lovely contrast to the long-winded, messy process of cooking dolma. We were dancing, learning, and healing as we listened to the everlasting, therapeutic sound of dolma boiling in the bubbling water.

Papa came home hungry. We rushed to tell him about our successful day, panting as we said that we helped Mom with the dolma. There is so much joy when it comes to dolma. The four of us held each other in our stuffy Armenian kitchen, preparing to be filled and nurtured and loved by our dolma.

"What is that smell? What are you cooking in there?" Anonymous neighbor rang the doorbell with such aggression, forgetting that not everyone could afford to replace the thing that really wasn't ever supposed to break. Knocked twice too. Louder than the crashes of the pulsating cymbals and high-pitched snare drums in "Sabre Dance," except the neighbor's rowdy voice didn't make us dance uncontrollably. "I can smell it from my house. Close the windows or something! Get rid of it or else I'll make a complaint to the House Board Committee Directors Association Organization!" With panic, we turned the tv and lights off. Papa snuck onto the balcony, and in a thick Armenian accent, he said, "I'm sorry, I don't speak good English."

Neighbor left! Neighbor shook head! Neighbor threw up fist! Neighbor mumbled bad words! Neighbor filed a complaint! Papa exhaled and laughed. He told Mom that moment made his day in Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani words. We were left curious and confused, too young to piece together why he was laughing. Mom laughed too and said in unfamiliar Armenian words, “At least in Azerbaijan they didn’t complain about the smell of dolma nearby an Armenian home!” They laughed for endless minutes. We didn’t know why. But we knew that we should always keep the windows open.

We resumed being in our stuffy Armenian kitchen, counting down the minutes until the dolma was ready. Mom took out the lavash basket, the canned tomato sauce, and the plastic bottled kefir. Dolma was everywhere, its earthy aroma resisted all laws of physics as it melted into the fabrics of our sweaters, the thin plaster walls, and the Armenianness of our souls. We took our first bite and immediately felt whole. Its tangy, boiled beef stuffing would never taste incomplete. Its thin, delicate leaves would never be flimsy. Its potent, hearty aroma would never be found anywhere but home.

Christina Kevorkov is a first-generation Armenian-American currently studying English at the University of California, Irvine. Her parents immigrated to the United States during the 1990s, escaping the horrors of the Baku Pogroms. She has a sincere passion for writing, literature, and music. Her memoiristic, diasporic piece was inspired by her precious childhood memories with her family. She currently lives in Orange County, California.



# Lovenote from the Water's Edge

Astghik Akopian

Where do you spin  
my rugged people? Rest

on my shoulders. The men  
of this earth, their spineless

inventions, their bully  
laws, will parch you. Drink

your fill from my roots. The sandstone  
and shale I have filled

for you. My sweetest waters  
for your soft and weary hearts.

Astghik Akopian is an educator,  
writer, and naturalist living in  
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