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VERADZNUNT  
REBIRTH



Sam Bruguera

# HYEBRED MAGAZINE

ISSUE 09

SPRING 2021

# MASTHEAD

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Spring is a season of growth and new beginnings. After a year of loss and uncertainty, we are proud to present an issue that demonstrates resilience, hope, and rebirth. HyeBred Magazine's ninth issue showcases the Armenian veradznunt (վերածնունդ) in 2021.

No matter what stage in their literary endeavors, these talented writers and artists collectively make issue nine what it is today: eclectic and experimental, necessary and thought-provoking, riveting and awe-inspiring. We are so excited that this magazine keeps growing and providing a light in an otherwise endlessly ominous time. May these virtual pages inspire hope in you, dear reader, to always remember that after a long and dreary winter comes the promise of a spring bloom.

Thank you so much for reading.

Շնորհակալություն,

Rafaella Safarian  
Founder & Editor-in-Chief

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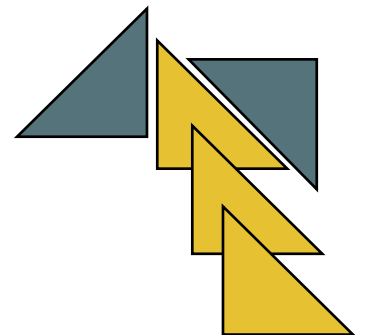
# FOR YOU, ARMENIAN SOLDIER

We did not ask you to carry such a burden,  
Yet you carry it regardless.  
We did not ask you to stand against such unforeseen madness and evil,  
Yet you remain steadfast.

You deserve so much more dear friends, dear brothers and sisters.  
You deserve to dance and sing under the peaceful skies, as it was always intended.  
You deserve to drink and be nourished by the untouched bountiful spoils of your home.  
Yet so much is done to prevent you from doing so.

You ride to war.  
You journey into the heart of fire, where darkness finds you.  
Yet, amidst the cold abyss, you shine as bright as the sun that graces your playful homeland.  
An eternal light that is unwilling to fade, surpassing all means of the night.

You go with smiles on your faces, upon the stomping of your feet on the earth of our ancestors.  
To the rhythms and melodies of our motherland.  
With such determination and purpose, that the mountains echo with your calls for eternal courage.  
Those same calls are forever etched onto the highlands of your home, where they await you.



We did not ask you to carry such a burden.  
And yet, you go with the might of so few, against the hate of so many.  
You deserve so much more, dear friend.  
One day may you find peace in your land.  
May you find all else but war and may it come as swift as the spirit that carries you.

We are forever in your debt, brave soldier of Armenia.  
Defender of the highlands, guardian of the gate to heaven, protector of the promised land.  
Let the sun shine on you as it always should.  
May you not be burdened with being the only light in the dark.

Let the blessings of all those who have come before, guide you.  
To victory, in all times, but most importantly to times of peace.  
The only thing you truly desire.  
Let there be peace in the mountains once more.  
Let your calls be heard, so you may rest and live beneath our playful skies as they once were.

**Arman Chaloosian** was born to an Armenian family in Oakville, Canada. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto and works full time in his hometown. In September he will begin a master's program at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs.

# COURAGE IN THE HIGHLANDS

I'm trying to learn what courage is

It's waking to see your village on fire  
Waking to see that the moment is dire  
Escaping your country when your people all die  
Leaving your homeland without saying goodbye

Living displaced while your mother cries tears  
Doing your duty when you're still filled with fear  
Revolution, but only the one that is kind  
Not the one that destroys and decays the mind

Reading a book that could cost you your life  
And maybe another's if the timing is right  
Writing a play, human comedy  
Becoming something when there is nothing left to be

Painting a portrait with only one brush  
Hoping tomorrow will bloom with a blush  
Literature in hiding when there is knowledge at stake  
Because it's worse to be blind than to be burned at the stake

Forgiving your captor when you look in his eyes  
Turning your cheek when your enemy lies  
Taking a train to seemingly nowhere  
Fighting for love when others won't dare

Giving all you have when the barrel hits bottom  
Waiting for the answer at the first sight of autumn  
Because things change, people change and feelings change too  
But I could never change the way I feel about you

**Jane Partizpanyan** is a 20-year-old journalism and public relations major at California State University, Northridge. A contributor to The Daily Sundial news outlet, CSUN PRSSA blog and CSUN's CAPTURED Research Journal, Jane has explored many different forms of writing. From objective news coverage, local reporting, and poetry, she has proven to be dynamic in her writing through her publications. Jane is the great-granddaughter of the Armenian playwright, Aramashot Papayan. Due to this, her mother's family was close with many writers,

including William Saroyan, Hovhannes Shiraz, Silva Kaputikyan, and Paruyr Sevak. The poem "Courage in the Highlands" explores the state of evolution before rebirth. "Courage in the Highlands" explores the history of Armenia's genocide and the Soviet Union through personal family experiences. With references of autumn, the last stanza nods to the symbolism of a new beginning and how despite tragic experiences, Armenia continues to be reborn into different eras of life. Regardless, the love a person has for one's country remains constant through the renewal.





Sam Bruguera

## HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN

Was it the incense and the prayers  
that had seeped into the Cathedrals' limestone walls that made it ours?  
Was it the homes  
that quietly dared  
to call themselves homes  
to share warmth, bread, wine  
and laughter?  
Was it the soil that baked like clay in a kiln  
turning the land to pottery  
the earth to art,  
but meant for hands to handle  
and for life to grow anew

Gayane Hovsepyan



**Sam Bruguera** is a 29-year-old butch, non-binary attorney, with chronic migraine, living in Little Armenia, Los Angeles. Sam's mother is parskahye and immigrated from Iran as a child.

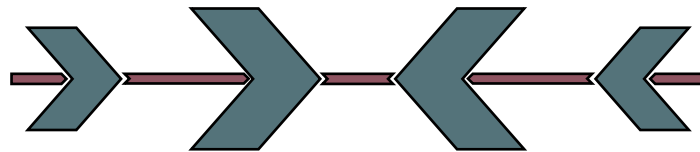
As a monoglot raised in a suburb of Los Angeles, the feeling of not being Armenian enough persisted quietly for Sam. When Artsakh was attacked in 2020, although far from any danger, they felt the visceral instinct in their body to be prepared to flee. They had seen these instincts before; in documents, cash, and jewelry hidden throughout their grandparents' apartment and in their grandmother's suggestions to just "tell people you are from Ukraine." Concerns about not being Armenian enough faded away. To validate generational trauma, and to keep the cultural heritage of Artsakh alive in their life, Sam created this multi-block lino print of the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral.

The Ghazanchetsots Cathedral has already experienced one rebirth. It was restored and reconsecrated in 1998 decades after being

damaged in the Shusha Massacre of 1920, which tragically resulted in 20,000 Armenian deaths. On October 8, 2020, the Cathedral was bombed by the Azerbaijani military. This cultural heritage site may be reborn once again as Armenia calls for the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral's restoration and preservation as a cultural heritage site.

While working on the print, Sam wondered if their mother's family surname, Gazani, could be connected to the name of the Cathedral. Their mother revealed, when she immigrated to the U.S., her last name was Ghazani with an "h". Sam also learned the quarter where the church is located was known as Ghazanchetsots t'agh as it was populated by the descendants of migrants from Ghazanchi. There is no way to be sure exactly what this means, but even these puzzle pieces mean a lot to Sam.

You can connect with Sam on Instagram at [@gazani\\_prints\\_](#).



**Gayane Hovsepyan** immigrated to the US at the age of seven from Yerevan, Armenia. She has previous online and print publications in *Westwind*, *Calliope*, *Lost Coast Review*, and *Poetry Quarterly*

amongst others. Gayane is a UCLA alumna and a third-year medical student at the Wayne State University School of Medicine in Michigan.

# POMEGRANATE

a crown, as bright and as blushing as the rest,  
it fits and it belongs on your head  
you embody and represent us.  
you hang down from your tree,  
you elect to drop into my open palm  
and I thank you  
and take root  
in your gleaming jewels we call seeds  
each one encased in a geometric and sturdy jelly of gushing sweet protection  
The flesh of the fruit  
surrounds them and offers a body for transport  
as we disperse across the world  
to new places and new ways of being.  
but we all know our roots are enshrined in glimmering garnet  
We will grow our own crowns  
and house our own jewels  
of wonder and hope

Our ornaments  
a recollection and celebration  
of the times we had, the times we lost, the times we could've had  
It makes sense that we house the hue of blood  
because we are bound and blinded by it,  
Our wreckage barely recollected by those who burst through to puncture the seed.  
Remember me. Defend me. Rise once more to be more than me.

**Taleen Postian**



Anashe Shahbazian Barton

## ILLUMINATORS

We were thrown into the shadow of the light, unseen and dark. The wax dripped down, our candle ancient and never waning. We ran across the earth, seeping into the woodwork, yet we retained our chemistries and compositions. Finding one another and molding back into a luminescent, glowing, united light. We are the children of illuminators. We are the light, shadow is what cowers behind us, afraid, eclipsed. We shine our light on a war so unjust yet so unheard. But only we hear its cries, so we must hold a microphone to this fragment of our collective voice, we must reverberate the message and the echo. Make others hear and make them see and make them act. This is a call to empathy and a call to action. They are intertwined and braided into our blood, the will to survive and the drive to thrive. We are the carriers of the truth and we are lighting the torch of those who listen. Never Forget and Never Again.

**Taleen Postian** is a poet from New York. Her writing has fallen under the realms of scientific literature, journalism, poetry, and birthday cards. You can write to her at [taleen.postian@gmail.com](mailto:taleen.postian@gmail.com). She thanks you for reading her work.



When reality unmasks itself in the grotesque monster of war, we are forced to reckon with why we are here. As Armenians, discussing our right to exist again and again is tiresome. Through generations this topic has been neatly packaged and parceled to all our children through camp, church, and community. So much so, that we've been conditioned to lose hope in our governments. Our story is one of survival. But not only survival. We are a people who unify when it is necessary and that is our beauty, because we have a noble cause. The only cause. To prosper and live peacefully in our ancestral lands and around the world. To produce and propagate and proliferate our creations, our recipes, our quirks and qualities. To love and lavish our language and localisms with our neighbors and friends of different tongue and creed.

We've been scattered across the globe. Through immolation, we've reinvented ourselves a thousand different times. We've adapted and re-adapted to whatever situation presented itself. The gene to adapt lies deep in our bones and may remain

dormant for decades. I can imagine when Artsakh was regained in the 90s that gene came out in our heroes who fought for the independence of our lands. And we felt this again this past year when our borders were challenged and inexplicable greed and delusion threatened us once more. Throughout the war we have lost friends, neighbors, brothers, sisters, landmarks, cities, and mountains.

But with each iteration of our struggle, we evolve into a further fortified and fervent generation. Our fight can only be won with our own hands, with our brain and our wit, our creativity and our tact. These are the tools we've practiced and perfected for millennia. With each trial comes a newly awakened generation and a better iteration of our people. Fortuitously, we are everywhere, in every facet of every field, in each cross-section of society and culture. We are there and we are here. We have always been and we always will be.

So we will reinvent ourselves relentlessly. Mercilessly. Again and again.

**Anashe Shahbazian Barton**





**Anashe Shahbazian Barton** was born and raised in the Bay Area, California. Her mother was born in Iran and fled in 1979 at the start of the Islamic Revolution. A recent graduate from UC Berkeley, Anashe is a writer, photographer, aspiring law student and amateur filmmaker. In her free time, she experiments with film mediums

and techniques. She especially loves connecting with her local group of Armenian creatives and is currently working on an exciting film project with them. She aspires to work in diplomacy and will be attending a Master's program in The Hague this Fall. Feel free to reach out to her via IG (@anashoushi).



Anashe Shahbazian Barton

## WHAT THE SOIL KNOWS

Some time ago, I would have gladly

thrilled at the implications of  
simile brought on by a butterfly at the foot of fossils, like the ghost

of a volcanic explosion. The obsidian shatters ever so easily now,  
falling into graves of rooting mountains, threnody-wailing thrush

in the nests of dead cranes. It has been a long while since the bards  
sang of simple praises. When the temples fell, the discarded pillars

had dreams of strolling through valleys and rivers, visiting the  
rock they were hewn from, some time ago. This is an oracular

earth that begs to be touched, but only gently. You could not hold  
a more graceful truth than the quaking of Armenian aspen. Stardrift,



campion, and anise bow their little heads to remark on the diligence  
of a slowing current. Who are the bards to sing of grief and exile

when the language of this landscape wraps lavishly around bones,  
emerging with the miracle of syrupy figs, the joy of all sun-baked

fields? This is an amaranthine earth, oasis and desert. It forgave  
before you ever thought to transgress: a cunning invitation for you

to scorch your skin before the rains undressed, laughing, on your  
head. While we douse the unlit braziers of these mountains, the

earth beneath us shrugs, joining the tectonic plates of its shoulders,  
slow honey dripping from the comb. While we mourn the fires of

revolution, and the tragedy of maps, the waters rise, and swallows  
dip their beaks in pools of lakebound trees. While we stitched our

dead into old songs, the earth sang, rotted, grew, a symphony  
of discord rolling in the hills, shaking away the burning nights.

In its prophetic cycles, the soil knows that volcanoes do awaken,  
sighing soot and ash, quiet beneath lamenting cranes and hungry

drumbeats. It is only then, when the violets croon with the stars,  
that we will dig our noses in the ground with the carrion crows,

stuffing our starving faces with everything that was, and everything  
we lost, and everything we love,

and everything that will be, all at once.

**Nuard Tadevosyan** is a poet, artist, and scholar living in Tkaronto, colonially known as Toronto. She is currently writing her master's thesis, in which she examines the production of medieval Armenian manuscripts through a lens of diaspora identity, and conscious cultural preservation. Her ancestors hail from Kemrakuch, Tatev, Gavar, and Karin. You can find her on Instagram at @nvardist.

# HREGHEN'S DREAM

A long dress of bluebells draped along the mountainside, the shame of stones and soil protected by their tears. Crestfallen flowers mimic the mighty willow, long branches leaning in to listen as the loud cry of its subjects grows more intoxicated.

Where am I?

*Beneath the oppressive eye of an indifferent Moon.*

The world tumbles and turns, squeezing in on itself ~~like a lonely widower.~~

Cool winds drop from the clouds, concealing us from The Interloper's gaze.  
Behold! a lone nightingale perched upon the willow's most hapless branch.

*My heart has been pierced, forlorn and unconsolated. They've left me here to mourn; my own eyes have lost their luster.*      His thoughts, or mine?

I reach out, ~~hand trembling.~~

hoping to catch and swallow his longing sound.

I want to share in the nightingale's painful song, but before I can,

he flies away.

**An unerring wail replaced by a howling wind**

**like to a pack of angry wolves that cry;**

one by one the branches of the willow break apart,

a wintry blast numbing the bluebells,  
hounds tearing at my throat.

*"That child of earth, false, illegitimate..."*

~~comes a cry cascading down;~~

an agonizing sob pierces through my snow-bound night,  
splintering the willow's bend without relent;

the nightingale reclaims its throne,

*"... cast it into the storm, let it find its fate,"*

shattered though it may be.

*"The soul is born eternally alone,"* the bird sings, *"my dream understood by none."*

I want to call out, drenched in blood;

~~how does red wine taste to the cold?~~

~~Can it get any more drunk?~~

The nightingale turns to me with eyes like the consequence of a deep storm,  
“*Hokís,*” it said, “*Can you hear me? Can you really hear me? You are the first in quite a while.*”  
I try to smile, but the white of snow blends with the dull blue of dead flowers, the black of a  
ceaseless night with the brown of a broken willow and the red frothing from my lips.  
The nightingale looks afraid for the both of us. Another storm sounds beyond the mountain.

I awake before long.

**John Danho** is an adjunct professor of English at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California. When he isn't teaching or grading, John is hard at work composing new poetry and prose under the pen name “harasharzh,” which roughly translates to “forever moving” in Armenian.

The piece included in this issue of HyeBred is a prose-poem excerpted from a larger project: the composition of a fantasy novel that marries pre-Christian Armenian mythology with Western traditions. Furthermore, “Hreghen’s Dream” is inspired directly by the works of Avetik Isahakyan,

much of the imagery and even a few lines borrowed from his poems “Ye Mountain Bluebells” and “The Wind is Howling Through the Winter Night.”

One of the novel’s principal characters, Hreghen Greystone, starts to communicate with an ancient creature in her dreams. Fragmented, confusing, and somewhat terrifying, Hreghen becomes intrigued by these dreams and by the tragic tale of this creature whose species was eradicated long ago. He is the last of his kind, and she is the only one that can hear him. This piece for HyeBred is Hreghen’s first exposure to this ephemeral burden.

# HENRY

Eight billion souls on Earth. Think of us as a stack of lines moving forward, some start before you, some after; likewise, here on earth, the eight billion parallel moving lines are finite, and some end before you. They say on average each of us knows about 600 people, and let's suppose out of the 600 we really are in regular or occasional or even rare contact with 100. That sounds like a lot of people but not compared to eight billion souls. The people we know and love are like one in ten million.

---

I'll tell you what kind of person Henry, my *Bajanag*, my wife's sister's husband, is. When he realized his car had been stolen, he laughed. I was there, and because I appreciated how he looked at things, I laughed with him. The car was 20 feet away from us, the keys in the ignition, and the engine running. But I'm ahead of myself. I didn't laugh until he asked me a question. Henry almost always opened a conversation with a question. It was late in December, somewhere in the neighborhood of 29 degrees by the way, around 9 at night. I was standing on the top rung of the ladder, tossing blankets on top of orange trees in order to save our father-in-law's oranges from frost damage.

"Jack," Henry said from the bottom of his ladder. "Do you notice anything missing?"

"Missing?"

Usually, I knew all about the question, whether it was functional, or open-ended, or something he wanted to razz me about. Just 10 minutes earlier he had asked

whether I would rather be here, freezing, or at the party Grace and I were supposed to go to. I said I'd rather be here. He laughed at that.

"Yes!" he answered. "Something is missing."

I could hear the exclamation point in his voice and see the smile on his face, even in the dark. I took inventory—orange trees, ladders, blankets.

"I don't see anything."

"Did you notice that it suddenly got darker?"

The car was gone. The lights were supposed to help us see, but a car with the engine running and the keys in it were more than a car thief could resist. And Henry laughed, I joined him, and later our laughter baffled the police officer while he was trying to write the report.

"Jack, a car is a car," Henry said as the patrol car pulled away.

---

A song came to my mind a few days before Henry died. At first it was just a fragment of the lyrics, "Always howdy, howdy and never goodbye." I found the song, "Move On Up A Little Higher," on YouTube, played it multiple times by Mahalia Jackson, Joe May, Deborah Thomas, and Bessie Griffin. There were other phrases that got my attention, "Lay down my heavy burden," "drink the healing water."

---

We were sitting in the living room of his house when Henry told me early on that there are 15,000 American citizens with ALS. It was quiet. I stared at the coffee table, at the chocolate-covered almonds, walnuts, and dried apricots in the segmented serving dish, and then at the carpet. That number, 15,000, I wrestled with it, threw it on the ground, but it couldn't be pinned. Why would fate pick Henry? My son-of-an-accountant mind started calculating, while Henry, face relaxed and patient, watched me. He had not spoken bitterly, but matter-of-factly. Three hundred sixty million people,

half of them in the age range to get it. The number rang up: Odds were over 99.99% for not getting ALS. I tried to make words come out of my mouth, but there was nothing to say. Henry only nodded.

---

In October of 2020 California was on fire but we took a day trip to Monterey, I was riding shotgun; it was around 8:30 in the morning, and I leaned forward and took a picture of highway 99, fifty miles north of Fresno. The road, fanned out in the foreground, looked like we were chasing a Stealth Bomber. The sky above the horizon looked like a sturdy bank of gray fog but was smoke from the fires. To the right you could see one, then two telephone poles instead of dozens into infinity.

“Do you want to travel together with Arpi and Henry tomorrow?” Grace had said the night before. We considered the closed space of the truck’s cab, whether wearing masks on a two-and-a-half-hour trip would last. None of us had gone anywhere anyway. We decided to go.

**YES, WE SAT CLOSE, TOLD STORIES,  
AND BROKE BREAD TOGETHER.  
YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE  
UNTIL IT’S GONE. I STILL DON’T LIKE  
CALAMARI THOUGH.**

“Take a picture,” Henry said, not knowing I had already taken one. I turned the camera sideways and the picture, with more grey sky and no telephone poles, looked like an album cover for Windham Hill, the old “New Age Music” label.

We stopped in the usual Monterey places, and they were as scenic as they ever were. The ocean was lovely, steady, and had that calming effect. The seagulls now competed with squirrels for attention, but otherwise did all their usual seagull things, and the Cypress trees were as picturesque and graceful as they have ever been. The smoke put a grey tint on the blue sky, and was always above us; our minds were very busy holding its presence as far away as we could. The fact that we were there, walking about, taking scenery pictures, or selfies, or gazing into shallow pools looking for normalcy was, under all the circumstances, unsettling. Still though, it was better than sitting at home flipping through posts on social media, reading what people, you may or may not know, want everyone to think about. Trust God. Pray, Don’t worry. God will recuse the faithful. But I never saw anyone post Isaiah 45:7, “I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.”

On the Wharf we reached a shaky consensus to have lunch at a place with a patio. The clam chowder was good, and having a restaurant experience (at the furthest point from the other tables, while the waitress tugged at her mask) was comforting and a little rejuvenating after going six months without one. Yes, we sat close, told stories, and broke bread together. You don’t know what you have until it’s gone. I still don’t like calamari though.

I drove on the way home. Henry rode shotgun. We got lost, made a wrong turn without any opportunity to turn around for a mile or so. Finally, I pulled into a residential driveway that was narrow and dead-ended in 10 feet. I backed out into opposing traffic coming from both sides watching out for a deep ditch on either side of the street. We made noises of panic and hilarity. We got on the right road and headed in the right direction eventually, somewhere around Watsonville, an agricultural town, an introverted, inland counterpart to Monterey. Almost immediately we hit miles and miles of three-mile-an-hour traffic. It was calm though, as if thousands of us all had tickets to somewhere worth the wait.

Hand-painted roadside signs announced stands offering honey, oranges, or avocados. Most often it was avocados. Henry wanted to stop, but none of the rest of us wanted to. Ten roadside stands later, a sign declared, Avocados 15 for \$1.

“There you go, Henry,” I said, “good thing we passed all the other places.”

We all commented skeptically on what seven-cent avocados might be.

“Once you get in there, they’ll say they sold out,” I said.

“They’ll look like walnuts,” Arpi said.

“Garbanzo beans,” Grace said.

“Let’s see who’s right,” Henry said.

I can’t remember if the place was closed or not. Most of them were closed. The sun was down but you could still see the outline of the fields, signs, occasional grocery stores and gas stations. I didn’t want to turn the lights on yet, and I didn’t want to stop, not even to see seven-cent avocados.

We were tired and quiet. The traffic opened up and we figured out where we were and how to get back to the familiar route home. Taffy purchased on the Wharf got passed around. Grace told Arpi and Henry that I liked to drive, which is true. I told them I had to pee though, and there were no buildings anywhere. Nothing but the plants and the earth that held them. Henry called out opportunities for me at a bush or a boulder or an orchard. We kept rolling. It got quiet for longer periods of time.

“What are you thinking about right now?” Henry asked me.

“What am I...”

He thought I hadn’t heard him, and he cleared his throat.

“Uhhhhem. What are you THINKing about?”

My mind scrambled for an answer. How could I tell him I was thinking about sad things on a good day? The fires, the smoke, the pandemic, the president testing positive for covid, the confusion, and Armenia at war and outnumbered 10 to 1. Henry and I had talked about all of it almost all day. We did not talk about ALS, moving him along steadily, that was my thought at the moment, sitting like smoke from the fire on top of everything.

“I, I was thinking about what I’m going to do when I get home, sleep or read.”

“Jack, everything that happens in the world is interesting.”

Did he really mean everything? Did he guess what I really was thinking about? He always used to say, “Jack, life goes on,” or sometimes, “Jack, life is tough.”

“Interesting? Why is all this, why is everything happening all at the same time, Henry?”

“It makes life exciting.”

He had his mask on, but I knew he was smiling. And I watched the road but I knew his arms were folded across his chest, as if he had told the best joke and won an important court case at the same time, the jester and the sage all in one.

Everything was dark. We couldn’t see the road, or each other. Henry asked if the lights were on. I had turned the switch but I didn’t see any light on the road in front of us.

---

---

I’m so old now that I fell asleep at the keyboard the other day, and slept long enough to dream that Henry had moved on up a little higher and drank the healing water, and had Armenian coffee and paklava with Bartholomew and Thaddeus at the gates of heaven. I don’t have any proof that heaven or any afterlife exists; even the Bible says it is a mystery we take on faith that our perishable body will become imperishable.

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I visited Henry often. We talked about our usual topics—politics, church, old stories, new events—and everything felt normal. Sometimes it was quiet, and then Henry would sleep. If I napped though, he would take my picture and send it to me. He’d also send it to our respective wives while they were out shopping together.

We’d watch TV and he’d switch back and forth from MSNBC to Fox News, knowing I’d be happy with one and agitated with the other. “You have to hear both sides,” he said. He’d end up on YouTube though and we’d watch the history of the Ancient city of Ani, and then the history of Armenia, which we watched a couple of times.



"Henry, our history is a never-ending series of being conquered by one regime or another," I said.

"Yes," he said, while the sorrow of 2,000 years of struggle hung above us.

He switched to Armenian singers in Armenia singing to enthusiastic crowds in a beautiful venue. He favored one singer in particular. "She's famous," he said, "she's singing about the brave soldiers in Artsakh."

After a while though he would play weddings that featured the most amazing Armenian and Lebanese dancing. The incredible footwork and the intensity and joy of the dancers was inspiring, soul stirring. We watched those clips enough times to almost feel like we knew the dancers, the musicians, and those seated, watching while the clamor and motion shook the glitzy reception hall.

The last time I visited Henry he put on something called "Incredible Dog Challenge" which lived up to its name; the incredible dogs, spurred on by their enthusiastic owners, would compete in events including hurdle racing, fetch it, and diving, all of which was far more watchable than conventional dog shows.

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The waves of the Mediterranean roll lazy and low, the moon illuminates the top half of "Moses Mountain" where 4,000 Musa Dagħ Armenians held off the Turkish Army until they ran out of ammunition and harrisa, a wheat porridge, and held up a banner asking for help. A French warship rescued them.

"What did the banner say?" I ask Henry.

"Christians in distress," he says.

"40 days."

"It was 53. From July to September."

We are quiet for a while, considering the siting of the ship. I'm trying to figure how they got to it.

"They..."

"They swam out there," Henry says. "The young men, not guys like us."

I try to imagine Henry's mother, six years old at the time, on a mountain with 4,000 neighbors trying to hold off the Turkish Army, and Henry's father, 18 years old, among them.

There is power in the silhouette of the mountain. We stand, silently, and then head back to the bus.

In the year and a half that followed, every time we were together—Arpi and Henry and Grace and I—one of us would say how blessed we were to have been able to go to Ancient Armenia.

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The day Henry died Grace and I were home in the backyard tending our newly-expanded vegetable garden. Grace put her phone on top of a stack of mulch bags and put the ringer on. We had peppers, *gutah*, eggplant, and tomatoes in pony packs; I wanted to finish our work for the day before the phone rang. When it rang, Grace answered and moved from the garden to the patio and spoke quietly. I tried to set the tomato plants in straight, neat rows. In June we will have an abundance of vegetables; by the end of August the plants will be tired, droopy, and done, but there is always the promise of spring.

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Just five months before he left us, Henry had planted a winter garden on the side of the house. A couple months later I was paying a visit and he turned the TV off and he signaled me to come with him. Like the riddle of the sphinx, Henry was now using a cane. We moved slowly to the front door. At the side of the house were neat rows of cabbage and kale, uniformly spaced, each one robust and proud.

"Amazing," I said. "Beautiful."

Henry put both hands on the cane, leaned forward, smiled, and nodded.

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I was stalling, but nothing can change the forward motion of time. I walked slowly to the patio.

"They're saying anyone who wants to go to the hospital needs to go now," Grace said, one hand holding the phone and the other covering it.

I looked at her.

“Do you think he...?”

“I want to remember him with all of us sitting in the living room, talking,” Grace said.

It was a long moment. We had a lengthy amount of time to face this loss, but it still hurt. Our lives here, though, are a blink, even half a blink compared to eternity, where it will be always howdy, howdy and never goodbye.

“Tell them to tell Henry that I’m planting tomatoes.”

Grace raised one hand in the air her fingers curled down, a wounded bird. Her other hand held the phone. She nodded to affirm my request, and I walked back to the garden.

**Jack Chavoor**

## SEED, SEEDLING, PLANT

“Saving this,” Dad said. He began scraping the contents of his plate onto the white paper napkin. The squeaking sound of the fork made me cringe. Toast crumbs, bits of string cheese, and tomato seeds he had carved out before he had eaten the slices—the entire process was an affront. It was the end of summer, the last set of tomatoes. The stain of gel-like water that held the seeds spread out, consuming the napkin, obscuring the patterns of bumps heading toward the thin, blue, curly-cue lines that bordered the perimeter. He folded it in half, patted it down. It may have been Old Country behavior, or just my father being himself.

“Dad,” I said. I was ready to retreat to my room and

play some music, maybe Neil Young caterwauling “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere.”

“Wait ‘til spring,” he said. “You’ll see.” It annoyed me that he sensed my annoyance.

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February isn’t the dead of winter. Maybe it is in Chicago, where my younger daughter and her family live. Maybe in Worcester, Massachusetts, where both sets of my grandparents began their lives in the United States. But in Southern California there is t-shirt weather, sweatshirt weather, and see-your-breath weather. See-your-breath weather—45 degrees Fahrenheit, we called “freezing.” Even so, for as long as I lived in Southern California, we did have something akin to winter. The weather was grey, cold, still, the leaves were off the trees, and there was a kind of despair, an impatience for more appropriate weather. February was a low-cloud sluggishness that not even Valentine’s Day could perk up. Any number of SoCal natives would have called February the dead of winter. Not Dad though.

From the kitchen I heard the dangling handles of his dresser bouncing off the closed drawer. I sometimes imagined I could determine Dad’s mood by the sound of the handles. This time it was jubilant, and it was freezing outside, and too dark for eight in the morning. I poured my Apple Jacks cereal, set the Corn Flakes out for him, and waited.

He marched into the kitchen, sweater over sweater vest, knees high—a drum major for backyard gardening.

“Good morning!”

I shoveled a spoonful of Apple Jacks into my mouth, realizing that there was no apple flavor to them at all; they were just Cheerios with sugar and cinnamon.

He sat down, reached into his pocket, and held a letter envelope above his bowed head.

“Today’s the day!”

“What day?”

“The first day of spring!”

“Dad, it’s February. It’s like, almost freezing outside.”

I was waiting for his account of attending school in Worcester in February, huddled around a pot-bellied stove at the back of the classroom, trying to defrost his hands.

“This is a head start. We’ll plant them and put them in the big window in the den. The first seedlings of spring!”

With great vigor Dad would routinely try to pull me into what interested him. I routinely resisted.

“That sounds good.”

“You say that like you’re still asleep! Wake up! The season of life is here.”

He shook the seeds out of the envelope into his hand and presented them to me. I studied his Jimmy Durante nose, wire-rim glasses, balding head, barber school haircut, and his delight in cornflakes.

“Seeds. Yeah, right. Spring. Almost.”

Dad turned the radio down. I poured more Apple Jacks into my bowl. I didn’t mind talking about what he wanted me to know; I knew though that I didn’t have the same exuberance he expected me to have.

“That’s the talk of the dead. The negative. The deficit. You should want life, especially at your age. The positive. The profit!”

“Prophet? Like, in the Bible?”

“Not every true idea is in the Bible. Profit, the plus.”

“Money?”

“Oh sure, of course, you have to pay the bills. But that’s not the only kind of profit. You have both, a balance.”

“By growing tomatoes?”

“From seed. Earth, air, sun, and seed. Everything has a beginning and growth and production. Then, so long, it’s been good to know ya! Until spring when it starts all over. Get it?”

“Yeah.”

“How do you think your grandparents lived in the Old Country? Drove to the store? They grew their own food.”

Mom came into the kitchen, listened in for a moment, drank a glass of water at the kitchen sink, and left us to decipher the meaning of everything.

“Well, I guess so, Dad.”

“Not you guess. These are true facts. The garden is where God is. You think God’s only in church?”

“No.”

“No. No is right. You can spend too much time in church and forget the things God does. Everything in nature tells about God.”

“Yeah?”

“The patterns.”

“There’s a verse like that in the Bible.”

“You don’t need to memorize that verse, it’s the seeds in the starters in the big window in the den. Get it?”

“Uh.”

“Then in a few weeks we’ll transplant them to the backyard. Then all summer we’ll enjoy tomatoes with real flavor, beautiful, bountiful, and we’ll share them with our neighbors. Now tell me, what’s closer to God than that? Is driving to Safeway, paying two dollars a pound for bland tomatoes from Bakersfield that came in a truck with the diesel exhaust blowing on them—is that closer to God?”

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“Jack! Come outside!”

It was tomato transfer day. I did not want to join him; I felt my time belonged to me. Why would he get up so early on Saturdays? I was sure it was just to make me feel bad. Mom wasn’t going to let me play deaf.

“Just go out there. You can give him some of your day. It’s important to him. Just 20 minutes. Look at it from his side.”

I had been 21 for a few weeks, it was spring officially, by the calendar on the kitchen wall, and the first day of spring had been circled with his red pencil for quite some time. What good was it being 21? I was so drawn to the notion of Jay Gatsby reinventing himself that I didn't pay much mind to the fact that he was a flawed and tragic character. At the same time, I admired Cool Hand Luke who could not help but be himself even while he could not figure how to fit in to Society's norms. At 21 I kept waiting to feel like an adult. I could buy Michelob or Lancer's, but I didn't feel smarter, wiser, or more ambitious. I mostly felt like Major Tom in that popular song:

*For here  
am I sitting in a tin can  
far above the world  
Planet Earth is blue  
and there's nothing I can do.*

I claimed every song about feeling sad, disconnected, lost, or stuck.

Mom put both hands on my back and shoved me in the direction of the back door.

"There he is!" Dad said, like my appearance was a miracle.

"Hey, Dad, what's up?"

Each year he took out more grass to make room for more vegetables, mostly tomatoes.

"The plants can't stay in the house the whole time. They're now strong enough to be outside, you know against the elements and all."

"What're we gonna do?"

We went about the business of turning the soil and mixing it with compost. He wanted me to hold the soil in my hands, and I did. But then he told me to smell the soil, at which I balked.

"What's a matter? You're afraid of God's earth? How you think the tomatoes are gonna grow?"

I dipped my head, pretending to smell the earth.

"Yeah," I said.

"Don't say yeah unless you remember it, and believe it."

"Okay."

I tossed the soil to the ground and brushed my hand off vigorously.

"Look at the soil. See how dark and rich it is? That's food for the plants. Everything's connected. The tomato plants replace themselves over and over. Seed, seedling, plant, seed. Everywhere in nature it's the same thing. Appreciate it!"

"Yeah, Dad, I do."

We planted a row and I slipped away to the kitchen, to my room, then out the front door to my car to the world of bookstores, record shops, pick-up basketball games, and meeting friends at restaurants to talk about very important things.

A graduate of the MFA program at Fresno State, **Jack Chavo** is a retired high school English teacher, originally from Burbank, California, now living in Fresno, California for the last 42 years. Jack is married to Grace and they have three children and four grandchildren.

# ԻՄ ՄԱՅՐ ԼԵԶՈՒՆ

Հայերենս, իմ մայր լեզուս- I am so proud to call you mine.  
They tried to kill you and erase you with the ցեղասպանություն,  
But here I am today with you. I will not let you down.  
Օտարները will not understand why and what you mean to me,  
They will continue to tell me to speak the language my mother was forced to learn to  
“assimilate,” but I refuse.  
Հայերենը իմ մայր լեզուն է:  
And NO, just because I use both languages to help them understand, does not mean I am lesser.  
In fact, I have more հարգանք for Մեսրոպ Մաշտոց than I do for I don't even know which  
ճերմակ մարդ:  
Hearing the Հայ պզտիկների speak իրենց Մայր Լեզուն, hearing them sing the «ԱԲԳԴ», is  
a պաշիկ to my heart, the biggest ժպիտ to my face.  
For we will not let you die, because you did not let us die. You kept us strong, you kept us  
միացած երբ մեր մամիկ ու պապիկները separated.  
This is why we speak so many forms of you. Սփիւռք ենք:  
You are more than words to me, to us. You are our միություն, our past, our present, our pain,  
our սեր, our կեանք and so much more.  
Զեն հասկնար: Ոյեւէ օր պիտի չեն հասկնար:  
We will not let you die.  
I love you. Կը սիրեմ քեզ:

## Translation Notes:

ԻՄ ՄԱՅՐ ԼԵԶՈՒՆ: *My Mother Tongue*

Հայերենս, իմ մայր լեզուս: *Armenian, my mother tongue*

Ցեղասպանություն: *Genocide*

Օտարները: *Foreigners*

Հայերենը իմ մայր լեզուն է: *Armenian is my mother tongue*

Հարգանք: *Respect*

Մեսրոպ Մաշտոց: *Mesrob Mashdots*

ճերմակ մարդ: *White man*

Հայ պզտիկներ: *Armenian children*

իրենց Մայր Լեզուն: *their mother tongue*

«ԱԲԳԴ»: *first four letters of the Armenian Alphabet*

Պաշիկ: *kiss*

Ժպիտ: *smile*

միացած երբ մեր մամիկ ու պապիկները: *United when our grandmothers and grandfathers*

Սփիւռք ենք: *we are a diaspora*

Միություն: *Unity*

Սեր: *Love*

Կեանք: *Life*

Զեն հասկնար: Ոյեւէ օր պիտի չեն հասկնար: *They don't understand. There is not a day they will understand.*

Կը սիրեմ քեզ: *I love you.*

**Serena Karina Pelenghian** is a 21-year-old Armenian woman from Arcadia, CA. She was born to Armenian parents; her father's family immigrated from Romania and her mother and family immigrated from Lebanon. Both Serena and her sister were born in California. Serena attended Armenian schools, Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School and AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian High School, from preschool until 12th grade. She is now a senior at Occidental College, majoring in critical theory and social justice and minoring in gender, women, and sexuality studies. Serena will be attending law school in the fall. She revived and is now the co-president of Occidental College's Armenian Students

Association, she is an intern and activist for the Armenian National Committee of America Western Region, and she culminated a grand oral historical project about the identity of the Armenian diasporan woman and the trauma of the Armenian Genocide. Serena is led by her passion and drive to lead her Armenian community and people in our fight for justice, for community building, and for unity. «Իմ Մայր Լեզուն» captures the essence of rebirth in the way that we revive the Armenian language when it is used as a tool to fight the forces of assimilation in the Western diasporas we reside in.



**Taleen Kesian**





**Taleen Kesian** was born and raised in Canada, and recently moved to the United States to pursue a career in Aerospace Engineering. With a passion for art, which started with sketching, she continues her exploration in other mediums. She has now added digital art to the list, and it has allowed her to re-experience her Armenian heritage. Her current interest is the interconnections between old Armenian pagan culture and Armenian Christian culture through festivals and symbols. This topic has also been included in her work for Perpetual Pomegranate (@perpetual\_pomegranate), a clothing brand she started to help raise awareness about Armenia's deep rooting culture. The idea was a by-product of the Artsakh war, as Perpetual Pomegranate was supposed to be a showcase of her paintings.

# HOW TO READ BY GASLIGHT

If a book of lies targets your mind  
Weigh it against breadless hips in the desert  
The missiles aimed at maternity  
The melting skin of soldier kin  
The silent stillborn rattles

Bright snowdrops will rise the same  
From fresh earth and mountains plain  
But neither Artsakh-trees clad in white phosphor  
Nor immortally fatal shores of Der Zor  
Will harbor false teeth or new flowers

Each night, cast your mind forward into  
The blaze of stars from the desert to the city  
Day by day, rekindle truth and repurpose pity  
Though empires, vampires, fragile tyrants moth near,  
Ջանիկս, stay clear, let *them* get dizzy

Tear out each page of each lie, slowly  
The bone fire is hungry, her flanks will know  
What to burn and what to keep holy  
In time only the binding will remain,  
A remnant, a new frame, for a new story

Write your book of Belong, Become, Be  
With hands gloved in Here Still Are We  
Weigh it against the ostrich feather in Egypt  
Once clutched by your հայրիկ, his գիշերօթիկ  
Heart still rests on the scale, waiting

## Translation Notes:

Ջանիկս means "my dear little one," a diminutive form of ջան ("beloved, light, soul")  
հայրիկ means "father" (հայր, more formally)  
գիշերօթիկ is a term for children in boarding schools and orphanages who stayed in such places overnight, as opposed to those who are at school during the day and then go home.

**Elise Youssoufian** is a US-born Armenian poet, artist, scholar and therapeutic musician with a world-shaped heart. Her biophilic projects—presently poetry and Armenian needlework—are rooted in restorative justice, cultural recovery and collective trauma healing. She also writes reflections for her Armenian Weekly column, "Walking and Asking," and is an artist-in-residence with Yerevan's Art and Cultural Studies Laboratory for spring and summer of 2021.

# THE SOUND OF WATER

We didn't notice it and he never talked about it. Except to make a scrunched up, annoyed-looking face. It was the most real face of his I would see. He looked like he was playing with his ear, but he wasn't. Just adjusting the volume. At a party, he'd smoke patiently outside; always at the periphery of the crowd, smiling to indicate he'd still like to be around everyone, he just couldn't hear them. The louder the noise, the more feedback through the hearing aid. I'd often see him walk away from conversations adjusting the small, plastic bean-shaped aid with his index finger—turning it off.

We knew Dad's hearing loss had a fancy name, *Meniere's Disease*, an inner ear disorder that causes tinnitus and vertigo. And he had had it for as long as anyone could remember. One of the family myths was that it was a result of "one of those childhood diseases that were always around," a Dickensian outcome. When I was two, he had a surgery to help with the vertigo and restore some of his hearing. Shortly after the surgery, at a family gathering on a hot Modesto day, he was the only one to see me fall out of an inflatable boat into the deep end of the pool. Saving me made the surgery null.

Like any child, I took all the senses that I had for granted. I never thought I wouldn't be able to smell my grandmother's cooking or watch television. Then, I was drawn by the tragedy that was Laura's sister, Mary becoming blind on the show *Little House on the Prairie*. Mary loses her sight after a bout of scarlet fever. Watching another child lose a sense felt real. I followed her story—a sudden student of trauma. Mary grows up, meets a blind young man and becomes a teacher. Her disability, center stage. Mary's storyline is that she overcomes her disability and lives what some deem a normal life.

In real life, I never measured Dad against his own disability. His hearing loss was just another part of him, like his smoking or the gold tooth I caught a glimpse of when he laughed out loud. I was used to repeating things and speaking louder in crowds and restaurants. I knew that if he was reading, that his hearing aid would be off, like closing the door to your office. *This comes in handy when your mother nags me*, he said. It was the one thing he could control about his hearing—shutting it off. He didn't fear the near silence.

At sixty, Dad described looking up one day over his Armenian coffee and seeing half the picture in his left eye. Half the room. Half of Mom. He had already had cataract surgery, but something had gone wrong. He must have been terrified.

Metallica has a song called "One" based on the novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. The protagonist in the song is an infantryman who loses his arms, legs, and all his senses, essentially living inside his head. At the end, he uses the only working part of himself, his brain, to tap out a message in morse code, *Please kill me*.

After corrective eye surgery, Dad spent 20 hours a day, for seven days, face down in a green, upright massage chair, his face squeezed through the donut-shaped part of the chair.

A month later he spent another seven days face down after his right eye saw half the newspaper page he was reading.

One eye didn't recover as well as the other, but again he adjusted. And if it was difficult as I think it was, he never mentioned it. He dealt with lung cancer much the same way. Illness never defined him. Or he masked it well.

I have ringing in my ears, too. Sometimes it's a roar; a fullness and pressure like diving down into the deep end of a pool. I don't need a diagnosis. I wonder if it's what Dad heard too.

**Ani Tascian's** work appears in *Citron Review*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Foliate Review*, *h-pem*, and others. Ani currently teaches creative writing at various Bay Area elementary schools and a memoir class at Berkeley Adult School. She's been awarded residencies at VONA and Vermont Studio Center and holds an MFA from Saint Mary's College of California. She's currently working on a book-length memoir about how generational trauma is held in families and in the body. [www.anitascian.com](http://www.anitascian.com)

# Meet 'A PHOENIX & HER ASHES' author Sarkis Kavaris!

*Interviewed by Rafaella Safarian*

**Congratulations on your new book! That is quite an achievement. If you could describe A PHOENIX & HER ASHES in a few words, what would you say?**

First of all, thank you so much for this incredible opportunity. I'm honored to be interviewed about my book for this magazine. I admire all that HyeBred Mag stands for; thank you for giving Armenian artists a voice.

The book is essentially a collection of writing - poetry and prose - that reflects upon the themes of love, pain, forgiveness, and growth. All of these are universal experiences; I wanted to explore them in greater detail. The book is my own interpretation of these concepts, their importance and meaning in our lives. We are so much more alike than different, and I think we should take comfort and solace in that. Your struggles are others' struggles, just as your joys are others' joys too. We're all connected.

**A PHOENIX & HER ASHES is divided into four main themes: Love & Loving, Pain & Sorrow, Grace & Forgiveness, Healing & Growth. Did this progression manifest organically? Or did you already have a vision about what your book would look like?**

I actually did not intend to publish any of my writing; I write mostly for myself. But when Covid hit and especially when the Artsakh war began, I started thinking about ways to contribute. So, I decided to publish the book. But yes, in a way, the writing did progress organically through those four main themes, albeit with some overlap. There's no rhyme or reason to writing - it just kind of happens. As I pieced the book together, things just started falling into place, and a progression of themes ensued.

**How long did it take for A PHOENIX & HER ASHES to come to fruition?**

I'd say it was about 3-4 years in the making, on and off.

**How did you choose the poems that would eventually make it into the final version of the book?**

Basically, everything in the book, I felt I needed to write at one point or another. Every poem meant something to me at the time I wrote it. That's usually my gauge in terms of what makes it and what doesn't. Also, I try to incorporate competing ideas or thoughts into my writing in order to find similarities or common underlying themes or threads that run through them. And I know I've written something real and worthwhile when I discover two ideas that seem so very different and incongruous on the outside and find that they share a strong underlying theme. As a writer, you know you've kinda struck gold when that happens.

**In your dedication as well as in a few of your poems, you reference your grandmothers. How have they influenced you and your writing?**

Both my grandmothers have greatly influenced my writing, as well as my life as a whole. They both have been sources of wisdom and grace throughout the years. There is a certain strength and vulnerability they possess that is very inspiring—to be real and to be wholly-present in this day and age is extremely difficult, and they personify those important qualities for me. We all need to be more present and real with ourselves and with others; to be vulnerable is to be strong.

**How has being Armenian influenced your writing, if at all? Do you write poetry in Armenian?**

I do not write poetry in Armenian, but I would like to venture into that realm at some point. I think being Armenian, especially in the diaspora, you feel like you're in this constant limbo between your heritage and this American tradition we find ourselves in. I think it's important to be honest with yourself about that struggle, and what it means to you. Anytime there is a struggle, there is an opportunity to write.

**What sparked your passion for poetry?**

I've been writing ever since I could remember; it's just the way I make sense of the world around me.

**You've unmistakably put so much heart and vulnerability into your work. Was it hard to be this raw and vulnerable knowing your words would be published?**

I think it just goes back to being real and authentic with yourself. I'm a firm believer in spreading goodness wherever life finds you, and in whatever capacity you can. And with the Artsakh war, I just felt it had to be done. I also felt that if I can make one person's life all that more bearable, or if something I've written resonates with someone and his or her experience, then who am I to fear being raw or vulnerable when there's a greater good at stake. There's a certain quote, and I forget who wrote it, but it's one of those motivational quotes – *courage isn't the absence of fear; but the realization that there is something more important than fear*. That quote applies to writing too, as well as anything worthwhile where you have to put yourself out there. There are "greater goods" out there that are so much more important than any of our fears or insecurities, and you end up finding meaning in them when you pursue that goodness and give of yourself to others.

**Do you have a favorite poem in this collection? How about a favorite poem/poet in general?**

My favorite writer probably is Rainer Maria Rilke, and his *Letters to a Young Poet* is probably my favorite book ever written. He has a passage in the book talking about the importance of patience during times when you're looking for answers. It's really deep. My favorite poem in my book is probably "A Phoenix". It's short, but powerful. It's about recognizing the parts of yourself you had to lose in order to achieve what you need to become, that it was necessary for your evolution.

**Your collection includes poems that are just three lines long and others that read like prose. How do you approach writing a poem? What does the writing process look like for you?**

Usually, it's a word or a phrase that I hear in conversation or in a song, and it kind of just stays with me for some reason. I let it sit there in my mind, and find ways in which I relate to it, or I think about what that word or phrase means to me: what it's trying to tell me about myself. Or about life. And somehow, in time, the writing just flows. I never know when or how, but it just does. And in general, the writing I identify most with and relate to is that which I needed to write down. I don't necessarily write for other people, but for myself. It's ironic how such a selfish act can affect others and find its own meaning in their lives. It's very humbling, really. It no longer becomes your story, but others incorporate bits and pieces of it into their own selves, so it becomes their story too. It becomes part of their meaning.

**As I was reading, some of your poems—like *the stillness of growth*; *work in progress*; or *embers of pride* to name a few—felt like they were directed at me, the reader. By using the second person "you," the narrator was encouraging me to love myself, be patient with myself. Who is the "you?"**

The "you" is anyone that is hearing or identifying with what's written. It's anyone that can relate to what's being written.

**What message do you hope A PHOENIX & HER ASHES conveys?**

I honestly hope that the book conveys a sense of hope and meaning in a life that sometimes seems so devoid of those things. And I also hope to show that we are so much more alike than different, that we share in our struggles just as much as we share in our victories. We're all part of the collective goodness in the world. It's just a matter of realizing it and acting accordingly.

**Your poetry is written in such a way that makes it very relatable for the reader. How important is voice?**

I think voice is very important. It all goes back to being vulnerable and honest, first and foremost with yourself. Writing isn't something you can fake. And you know if you've taken shortcuts or not.

**Any advice for those of us who want to start writing poetry or need help starting?**

Honestly, the only advice I could give is just to start writing. See if there's something within you that needs to be expressed, not only wants to be, but needs to be. And you don't have to write necessarily for anyone else. I find the best writing comes when you're addressing it to yourself, when you're directing it to yourself. That's when you're the most honest and vulnerable and ironically when you're so vulnerable with yourself, others can relate to it all that much more. It's a funny thing how that works.

**What was the publication process like?**

I ended up self-publishing through Amazon and through IngramSpark. You basically upload a cover as

well as the contents of your book. Formatting can be a bit stressful, but you eventually get the hang of it. I do also want to mention that an amazingly talented Armenian graphic artist- Aram Vardanyan helped me with the cover design. And he did it entirely pro-bono because he knew it would be going to an Armenian cause. I just wanted to give him a shout out—definitely check out his work.

**You and your family have recently lost a loved one. My deepest condolences. Would you like to talk about how he inspired or influenced you as a writer or a person in general?**

My cousin Jacob Kavarian passed away tragically and suddenly earlier this year at the age of 23. He had actually traveled to Artsakh after the war to give donations (via his group called Sahman) to families affected by the conflict. It was my intention to donate to his efforts, but unfortunately, I never got a chance to talk to him about it. Our family has set up a Go Fund Me page in his honor, in order to donate to the causes in Armenia and Artsakh that he loved the most and held dearest to his heart. As a family, we will be picking up where he left off, in his honor.

**Sarkis Kavaris** is a poet currently living in Los Angeles, California. His recently published book of poetry, *A PHOENIX & HER ASHES* is currently available at Amazon and may soon be available at local retailers. As his first book publication, Sarkis is donating all the proceeds to Artsakh through various nonprofit organizations and missions: Angin Armenia, which preserves Armenian culture through the arts while also raising funds for Artsakh; Kooyrigs; and Sahman, Sarkis's cousin Jacob's organization, as well as his [Go Fund Me page](#).



# PAST LIVES

I have often seen signs  
of my past lives:  
a stranger on the sidewalk,  
a half-familiar face or gesture,  
the shape and shadow of clouds,  
or the swirl of snow  
as the wind picks up,  
and a solitary leaf spirals down  
from the branch of a tree.

I dream of fabulous hotels  
in Paris along the Seine,  
dark barbarian hovels,  
Roman legions, ancient cathedrals  
in the shadow of Mount Ararat,  
and treks with lamas in the Himalayas.

I watch a delicate dance of skeletons  
exchange a crown of thorns  
in a long unbroken line of famine,  
powdered wigs, and gleaming guillotines.

I know a multitude of mantras  
and prayers in many languages—  
are these the threads  
of reincarnated lives?

Perhaps it is all an endless loop,  
repeating the same events  
across dimensions and strings  
of time held tight and plucked  
like an instrument tuned to a key  
heard just beyond the horizon.

# THORN BERRIES

Once, my grandfather was struck  
by lightning, turning his hair white;  
he was never afraid to walk in the rain again.

When he died, I placed his ring on my finger;  
in my imagination, he opened his eyes:

*I thought I saw a black and white movie  
about his life, the death of his first wife and child  
the crossing by sea, sewing carpets by hand,  
walking the streets of New York day and night*

all of this as I leaned over his coffin  
to kiss his forehead, careful to avoid the thorn berries  
I could see in the corner of his mouth,  
his lips pulled back as if to speak—

like the time we watched a boxing match on TV  
while I sat on his lap and he formed my hand  
into the shape of a fist, telling me to punch  
the rain, be wary of lightning,  
and the dead who pretend to know your name.

Still, I want to ask him does he remember  
walking through many lives,  
what the weather is like in that uncharted country,  
or if it is possible to find your way back.

**Michael Minassian's** poems and short stories have appeared recently in such journals as *Live Encounters*, *Lotus Eater*, and *Chiron Review*. He is also a contributing editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online poetry journal. His chapbooks include poetry: *The Arboriculturist* and photography: *Around the Bend*. His poetry collections, *Time is Not a River* and *Morning Calm* are both available on Amazon. His poetry manuscript *A Matter of Timing* won the 2020 Poetry Society of Texas' Manuscript Contest (publication: Summer 2021). For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

# THE RING FROM VERNISSAGE

I was born in the earth  
stoned to creation  
like the glimmer of life  
siphoned  
from the sacred women  
in the crypt of ancient churches  
hollow.  
holy.  
wrapped in embrace  
around your tender finger

I lived in an outdoor market  
next to brazen rugs  
woven by centuries of love  
noor.  
near.  
apricot trees.  
fields.

therein lies the low whistle  
of travesty  
so deep  
the genocide  
that still tremored  
in the lands  
no matter how far  
or how much time

But this ground  
through brilliance  
resistance  
still creates  
such beautiful gems  
like me.

**Darlene Moreno** is a first-generation Mexican from Los Angeles who lived in Karakert village, Armenia, for two years as part of her Peace Corps service. There she formed an unbreakable bond with her Armenian host family who became, simply, her family. Her tatik is the only grandmother she has ever known and she hopes to make her proud. Hayastan is home and she carries the Armenian people in her heart wherever she goes.

# THE GONG SHOW

Some might say the whole “seeing into the future” thing was my mind trying to justify what I already wanted to do: murder my boss and marry his wife. The three of us had been friends since college, even though I’m Armenian while Spence and Elizabeth are blue bloods from Philadelphia’s Main Line. Spence had purchased my father’s used car dealership, Artunian Motors, a year earlier when Dad needed money to pay for cancer treatments, which didn’t even prolong his life. A born entrepreneur, Spence quickly expanded Dad’s original lot into a veritable auto mall with multiple new car brands. I remained his CFO, but don’t be impressed by the title. I’d gone from heir apparent to glorified accountant and was compensated accordingly, which meant I was nearly broke.

That fateful day had started out with more trivial worries—whether my right knee could handle a couple of sets of tennis after work. Spence wanted to “bang some balls” to get out his frustrations that Elizabeth had recently filed for divorce when she discovered he was a liar and a cheat, the same reasons he kept me around as his accountant.

Spence was up 6-3, 4-2, and serving at 40-15, which was an excellent result for me. On a hard court, I would’ve been lucky to get a game or two, but we were playing on his country club’s red clay court where the ball moved slower, which gave me a fighting chance. Spence had a serve like Serena and could hit the crap out of the ball despite never having had a lesson, or so he claimed. He’d pound forehands from one corner of the court to the other, and like a possessed black Lab, I’d chase those yellow balls down.

But then my knee went out and I dropped to the ground like I’d been shot. I brushed myself off, too embarrassed to admit to Spence that at thirty-five I was falling apart. Since I could no longer run, however, I had to adjust my strategy. I started rushing the net on every point, kamikaze style, as moving forward seemed to bother my knee less than running side to side.

Surprisingly, the tactic worked.

“What the fuck, Gary?” Spence said when I punched a volley past him to go ahead 5-4. “You start taking testosterone shots without telling me?”

Gary was the nickname he’d given me when he said my real name, Garabed, was “too ethnic for the business world.” He had no idea of the mantle of history that name carried. Most of my ancestors, including my great-grandfather, Garabed, were massacred in Turkey during the Armenian Genocide. The few Artunians who survived eventually made it to Philadelphia, where my father was once called “a lower-class Jew.”

Not that Spence’s name change was fooling anyone.

I had bushy eyebrows, a rather prominent nose, and unruly, thinning black hair. My especially long eyelashes were my best feature. Spence, on the other hand, was the classic WASP with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a V-shaped chest, but as he flailed at my shots, I noticed he seemed a bit gaunt, like he wasn’t the same man—or quality of tennis player—without Elizabeth in his life.

When it looked like I was going to win the set—something I’d never done before—he shouted, “this is bullshit luck,” and smashed his racquet onto the ground. He kicked over his Gatorade and water bottles, too, which he kept perfectly lined up next to his chair. Tennis players were a superstitious lot, and Spence was no exception.

“Open a new can of balls,” he yelled. “These are fucking dead.” He swatted the ones we were using over the fence. If I hadn’t known him so well, I might’ve been worried he’d grab the Glock he kept in his car, a tool of the trade for a car dealer since so many purchases involved cash.

As we resumed play, he stopped speaking altogether, except to occasionally grumble the score under his breath. He’d always been a competitive guy. Hell, he’d stolen Elizabeth right out from under me. She and I had met as freshman at the University of Pennsylvania when Elizabeth was the lead in the school play and I was doing props. She was rehearsing on stage when I first walked into the auditorium. My body hummed at the sight of her like we were doing a musical, instead of the Greek tragedy *Elektra*. She looked like Grace Kelly: blue eyes, porcelain skin, a floral Laura Ashley dress.

"That is going to be my girlfriend," I said.

The other guys in the backstage crew snickered. I was short and stocky with ridiculous amounts of body hair. What princess would want to go out with me?

We met Spence a few months later at Penn's Winter Concert. Modest Mouse was playing when he sidled up alongside her, awash in expensive cologne. He pulled a flask from his underwear and offered her a swig. Later they disappeared together, missing the headliner, Death Cab for Cutie.

I fantasized that a victory over Spence in tennis would make Elizabeth re-evaluate that decision all those years earlier, but on the first set point I'd ever had against him, I shanked my shot high into the air. Spence had an easy overhead to put the ball away. I was up at net ten feet from him. I remember he had a faint smile as he lined me in his sight. Maybe he believed I'd turn so that the ball would smack me in the butt. But for the first time in our history, I stood my ground as the ball slammed into my temple.

When I came to, my white clothes were covered in red. I thought it was my blood and began to panic, but it was only the clay. I was seated on the ground, propped up against one of the net posts. Spence was on his cell phone and seemed frantic.

"Should I call 9-1-1?" I heard him ask. "Hold on, Herb, he's awake." Herb was the low-rent attorney the dealerships got a lot of use out of. Knowing Spence, he was concerned I'd sue.

"Hey, Gary, you okay?" he asked me. "How many fingers do I have up?"

I puked on his Stan Smith sneakers.

"Oh, Jesus. Herb, you better call an ambulance. Tell them to hurry."

He hung up and bent down beside me.

"Why didn't you duck? Why did you stand there?"

I wanted to ask why he would hit such an easy ball directly at my head or, better yet, why he'd taken my father's dealership, in addition to the only woman I'd ever loved, but I couldn't think straight. Letters and

words flew through my brain, but I couldn't make sense of what they were saying.

Spence sat down near me—though not next to me—as we waited. His phone dinged.

"Holy shit," he said, reading the notification. "Chuck Berry just died."

In my mind's eye, the words and letters spinning in my head merged into something I could finally recognize: a person's name.

"Chuck Barris," I mumbled, reading what I saw in my head.

"The game show host? No, you idiot, not *The Gong Show* guy, the music legend. You know 'Johnny B. Goode'?" He glanced over at me. "Shit, sorry, man."

I threw up again.

---

In the E.R., the doctors discovered I had an acute subdural hematoma, which was causing swelling in my brain, pressing on the pons area where dreams originate. I didn't know any of this at the time. I was in a coma for a week. Emergency surgery had to be done. Apparently, some people were more susceptible to head trauma. It figured I would be one of the genetically unlucky. When I woke, Spence was next to me, no longer wearing tennis clothes but an expensive, wrinkled suit.

"Oh my God, buddy," he cried. "How're you feeling?"

I tried to speak but couldn't.

"No, no, no, take it easy." He jumped up from the chair within reach of my bed and ran to get help. An attractive, dark-skinned woman in scrubs rushed to my side. Her nametag read Jennifer Ghosh. Involuntarily, my brain scanned her name like I was Googling her on my computer. I got no results.

"Welcome back," she said. "Did you have a nice sleep?"

As she smiled down at me, I got the sense that my recovery hadn't been a sure thing. After she hustled away to get the doctor, I took in what was clearly

the intensive care unit. My bed was surrounded by machines, most of them beeping and chirping. Thin white curtains swayed in the breeze created by their cooling fans. Through the curtains, I could see the outlines of beds, likely filled with other seriously-ill-patients. In front of me was a nurse's station.

"I'm so sorry," Spence said. "I'm such an ass."

I wanted to tell him I agreed.

"Well, you were right about Chuck Barris," he continued. "He died. Just a couple of days after Chuck Berry. It's almost like you predicted it. Weird."

I'd barely known who Chuck Barris was. I guess I remembered he was the host of *The Gong Show*, and that George Clooney had directed a movie about his life. But I'd never seen the TV show or the film. Why had I seen his name as though it was listed on an Excel spreadsheet? I'm sure at the time Spence thought I misheard him as a result of my injury. But I heard him quite clearly. When Spence said that Chuck Berry had died, the letters and words tumbling in front of me coalesced and instead spelled out Chuck Barris.

I CLOSED MY EYES AND  
AGAIN SAW THE STREAM OF  
LETTERS ROLLING BEFORE ME.  
I REALIZED THEY WEREN'T  
RANDOM LETTERS. THEY WERE  
PEOPLE'S NAMES.

I wanted to explain what I'd seen, but I couldn't talk. I closed my eyes and again saw the stream of letters rolling before me. I realized they weren't random letters. They were people's names.

I tried to get them to stop moving—or slow down—but the list kept going, seemingly infinite. The speed made me so dizzy I blinked open my eyes like I was having a bad dream.

"You all right?" Spence asked, looking concerned.

On the wall behind the station, there was a board with a list of patient names along with their locations. I saw my own name, Garabed Artunian, listed in bed four. I looked at the other names and the scrolling stopped like I'd entered a passcode: Gus Petrone. The board said he was in bed five, directly to my right. I glanced over but couldn't see anything through the curtains.

"Gus," I called out, though I wasn't sure what I'd say if I could spit out more than a single word. A group of doctors entered the room. I passed out to the sounds of them examining me. As my eyes closed—but before sleep took me—I saw Gus's name floating away like a piece of driftwood at the Jersey shore.

When I woke again, Nurse Jennifer was standing over me. Spence was next to me. "Welcome back," she said. "Feel free to stay this time."

"How long?" I forced out.

"It speaks," she said, nodding over at Spence. They seemed to have become chummy. She was definitely his cheating type: young, pretty, and far below his socioeconomic status. "You've been out another day."

"Gus?" I mumbled. "I saw his name in my head."

Spence got a strange look on his face.

"What happened to him?" I asked.

"He must have heard us saying Gus's name when we were trying to bring him back," she explained to Spence. "Hearing is the last sense to go."

If I hadn't been speechless, I would've told her that I hadn't heard his name, I'd seen it.

"Gus had a heart transplant, but it failed," she told me, patting my hand. She must have read fear on my face—though she didn't understand the reason for it—for she

added, “Don’t you worry. You’re gonna make it. You’ve already come through the hardest part.”

But what I was feeling wasn’t fear. It was a sense of possibility.

---

On the day of my discharge, Spence was scheduled to pick me up. I’d been in a regular room and out of the I.C.U. for a couple of days and was anxious to get out. Four more people had died since I regained consciousness and I’d seen all of their names in advance. I kept myself sane by watching episodes of *The Gong Show* on the iPad Spence bought me, searching the program for clues. If I had been granted access to a sort of ‘to die list’—which I still couldn’t believe—I didn’t find that fact worthy of me freaking out about it. After all, we were all going to die. Where was the news in that? I was an accountant. I dealt with inevitability on a regular basis. As the old joke says, the only two things certain in life were death and taxes.

But it was the film based on Chuck Barris’s life, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, that provided—if not answers—at least hints. Barris claimed he’d led a double life: game show host on one hand, CIA assassin on the other. Apparently, I wasn’t the only doofus with a secret. Supposedly, he’d killed over thirty people. Though I wasn’t killing anyone, at least not technically, I’d also done nothing to intervene.

Could someone’s life be saved if I used what I saw?

“Looking good,” Spence said when he walked into my room. He pointed at the bandages covering the drill holes in my shaved skull. “You’re gonna get laid. Women love scars.”

Despite his attempt to cheer me up, I knew the truth. I wasn’t a sight to look at *before* the surgery.

“You ready to roll?” he asked.

“Not quite. I have something to tell you.”

Spence took my story better than I expected, which might have surprised me if I hadn’t grown up in a culture where superstitions were taken seriously. Armenians believed that sneezing once was bad luck, so all my sneezes were required to come in pairs, which I often had to force myself to do. Maybe it was because

Spence was a life-long gambler and believed strongly in luck—especially bad luck. God forbid you moved from your seat if the Philadelphia Eagles were winning, which I’d done once at their home when I wanted to be alone in the kitchen with Elizabeth. That didn’t mean he didn’t have questions, however.

“You see their names? In your head?” he asked.

I nodded.

“And they’ve all died? Like Chuck Barris and Gus?”

I nodded again. It had happened too many times to be a coincidence. Unless I’d gone crazy.

But I didn’t feel crazy. I felt centered in a way I couldn’t remember being for a long time. It was like I’d seen my name on the list and decided that before *my* time was up, I was going to live the life I’d always wanted. Even my right knee seemed rejuvenated. Perhaps it was the bed rest.

“How long?” Spence asked.

“What?”

“How long before they die?”

I’d done the accounting on that. “A couple of days,” I said. “Some were only hours.”

“Jesus. Not much time to get your affairs in order—or go out with a bang.”

“I know.”

“Can you, uh, check mine?” Spence asked. “Not that I’m worried. I mean, everyone whose name you saw was sick or old.” Spence flexed his bicep like I was Nurse Jennifer and would be mightily impressed. When I didn’t close my eyes to scan for his name, he begged, “Come on, Garabed, see if my name is on there.”

He hadn’t used my real name since college, so I closed my eyes. Letters rolled in mid-air like reels on a slot machine. When they spelled out Spence’s name, I gagged as if I might throw up on him again. In a flash, I knew my plan before I even knew I had one. When I opened my eyes, Spence knew I’d seen something terrible.



“What? I’m gonna die. How? When?”

I wanted to explain that I saw nothing other than his name. I didn’t see how he would die or where—just that he was going to.

Instead, I said, “Elizabeth.”

His knees buckled like mine must have done when he’d rocketed a tennis ball at my head. To be honest, it felt a tiny bit good. Not that I would ever want anything to happen to Elizabeth. For years, I’d wanted to beg her to leave Spence whenever we had a moment alone at one of their catered dinner parties. But after I made the mistake of covering up for him once, it was forever too late for me to come clean. I feared that if I told her, she’d blame me for not coming to her right away. And that I’d never see her again.

Spence sat on my hospital bed like he was ready to check in. “It’s gotta be some kind of accident—or a robbery,” he said. “I’ve got to go protect her. I’ll sit with her for a few days. Make sure she doesn’t go anywhere.”

“That’s not gonna work.”

“Why not? I’m not going to die. You would’ve seen my name. I’ll stay with her until the time is up, so she’s safe.”

“She kicked you out. She doesn’t want to spend five minutes with you, let alone three straight days.”

Spence lifted his head toward the ceiling as if he was beseeching the heavens for guidance. It took me a second to realize he was reading the ESPN scores ticker on the TV in my room.

“Even if she did let you in,” I continued, “how do you know she’ll believe you? She’ll think this is some crazy excuse to get back with her.”

Spence stood and wrapped his manly hand around the base of my neck. “You have to convince her. You’d know by now if your name was on the list, which means you and I are both safe. We’ll take turns watching her. If nothing is going to happen to us, nothing will happen to her.”

I didn’t share his confidence. But I wasn’t going to tell him that.

**I CARRIED THOSE RED AND YELLOW  
PETALS IN THE POCKETS OF MY  
SWEATPANTS LIKE THEY WERE  
DIAMONDS, PRESENTING THEM TO HER  
BACKSTAGE ON OPENING NIGHT...IT  
WAS OUR ROMEO AND JULIET MOMENT.**

At the front door to what I called “the castle,” Elizabeth hugged me warmly, but gently. “I didn’t know you were getting out.”

“I’m not gonna break,” I said. “Just no tennis for a while—or with your husband ever again.” I laughed. Even under these circumstances, it made me happy to see her.

“Soon to be ex.”

I gestured toward Spence’s Bentley at the end of the driveway.

“What’s he doing here?” she asked.

“I needed a ride. If you let me in, I’ll explain.”

“Of course, but he’s never setting foot in this house again.”

I’d been waiting years to hear her say that.

Elizabeth offered me an iced tea but, knowing the situation, I suggested tequila.

“I think I deserve a shot,” I said, pointing at the bandages covering the holes in my head.

“I think you do, too.” She flashed her movie star smile my way, which made my knees go weak the way they had on the clay court. Maybe if I’d had some balls and tried to kiss her, things would’ve been different. But in a blink it had been too late—they were married, had

a house, a life. Me, I experienced it all through their credit card receipts and loan statements.

In the see-through cubicle that passed for my office, I'd go on vacation with Elizabeth via their American Express bills. Paris. Belize. Las Vegas. I imagined how the jewelry I'd buy for her birthday (March 23rd) would be far classier (and cost less) than the gaudy stuff Spence brought home. It was a silly game, but I couldn't help myself.

Elizabeth found some tequila, the bottle made of hand-carved, decorative tiles. I recognized the label since I'd written the purchase off as a capital improvement, the category I listed all expensive booze in. We sat at her dining room table and each did a shot.

"I came by to visit you," she said. "Twice."

"I figured when I saw the tulips." I'd brought her tulip petals once in college—not the whole flower, just the petals—in the all-too-brief period before Spence came along. I carried those red and yellow petals in the pockets of my sweatpants like they were diamonds, presenting them to her backstage on opening night. I'm sure the other women in the cast thought it—and me—strange. Elizabeth looked bewildered, but she accepted them with open palms. It was our Romeo and Juliet moment.

"It was hard finding a time Spence wasn't there," she said. "I went by a half-dozen times and spotted his car."

For a shitty person, maybe he wasn't such an awful friend. If he hadn't taken Elizabeth and my father's business from me, I might even have liked him.

I poured us another shot.

"Are you, uh, supposed to be drinking?" she asked.

"Only good tequila."

"Ha ha. Not that I'm not happy to see you, but..."

"Why am I here, right?"

There was a banging on the front door. She looked upset, as if I'd tricked her.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll get rid of him."

By the time I reached the foyer, Spence was inside, holding his Glock sideways like a character in a gangster movie.

"I told you to wait outside." Though I knew he wouldn't.

"What are you doing in there?" he whispered. "Having a drink?"

"Yes, actually. Blurting out that someone might die requires a bit of tact. Something you might try sometime." I pointed at the gun.

Spence wasn't used to being spoken to like this. He was bigger than me and gripping a semi-automatic pistol. But I was no longer afraid of him. That didn't mean, however, that he was afraid of *me*.

He pushed past me toward the living room, calling "Lizzie, Lizzie." It was like a scene in a movie where the husband has caught his best friend cheating with his wife, though I knew it wasn't jealousy Spence was feeling. It was panic at losing her.

"You're not supposed to be here," Elizabeth said, standing up from the table. "I'm calling my attorney."

Then she saw the Glock.

"Oh my God," she said. "I'm calling the police."

"You're scaring her," I said. "Give me the gun."

Elizabeth pulled her cell phone from her pocket and started dialing.

"Don't," Spence said. "I need to tell you something."

"Give me the gun," I said and put my hand on the barrel.

Spence resisted—though I could tell he knew he should give in—and we wrestled for control, but he was stronger than me. I had no real chance of taking the gun—or her. All I could do was guide the weapon where I wanted my life to go.

I didn't expect Elizabeth to love me. I felt assured, though, that my knowledge about how to run the dealership and my competency in managing her bills and investments, as well as handling the estate issues

certain to come up, would bring us closer, and maybe, over time, into the type of relationship I wanted. After all, I was about to save her life.

I pulled the nose of the Glock so it pointed in Elizabeth's vicinity, surprising Spence by jabbing my finger onto his and squeezing the trigger. The bullet took out the bottle of tequila.

"My husband just shot at me," Elizabeth yelled into the phone. "Hurry." She ran and disappeared up the stairs.

"What? No, he..." Spence had a quizzical look.

Seizing my historic opportunity, I turned the gun toward him. This time I didn't miss.

**Robert Kerbeck** is the founder of the Malibu Writers Circle and a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. His forthcoming memoir, *RUSE: Lying the American Dream from Hollywood to Wall Street* (Steerforth Press/Penguin Random House Spring 2022), is a thrilling look into the extraordinary world of corporate spying. His debut book, [\*Malibu Burning: The Real Story Behind LA's Most Devastating Wildfire\*](#) won the 2020 IPPY Award as the Silver Medalist in Creative Nonfiction, the Readers' Favorite Award as the Silver Medalist in Nonfiction Drama, and the Best of LA award. *Malibu Burning* was also a finalist for Foreword Book of the Year and the National Indie Excellence Awards. His essays and short stories have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *The Normal School*, *Atticus Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Gargoyle*, *upstreet*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Zone 3*, and *The MacGuffin*. One of his stories was adapted into the award-winning film, *Reconnected*.

# HYE MENU

rose water  
*look at your reflection*  
soaked and seared  
olive skin in summer  
sunflower seeds | worry beads  
*life giving sweet water* mist  
pomegranate  
*aryun*  
the color of bliss  
sumac embroidery  
secrets between *eech*  
*lavash* buried  
lamb like man  
in pilaf sheets  
asleep  
in pointed shoes  
burning  
watch and eat  
smoke  
drink  
*dumbelek*  
*dance*  
like poppies  
fruit sweetened by sun  
philosophy & *bling bling*  
deflowered almonds  
black tea with cardamom  
*coffee* with superstition  
shining gaze of gold  
a surprise broken  
something to lift  
a rose  
to the face  
instead of a fist

**Alethia Grishikian** is a self-taught poet and lyricist. She unconventionally practices many art forms and has been curating quietly for a long time. She sings and loves pancakes. Her instagram is @veganvxxen.

# ՍԿԻՉԲ

Մշտական դպրոցական առավոտն էր: Ձմեռ էր: Գիշերը առաջին ձյունն էր եկել: Նայում էիր շուրջդ ամբողջը ծածկված էր ճերմակ վերմակով: Ես մեքենայով էի գնում դպրոց, բայց կարողացա գտնել ժամանակ քայլելու համար այդ ճերմակ ու ճոճռան ձյան միջով: Այնքան եմ սիրում ճերմակ ձյունը, ձմեռը եւ ամենաշատը սիրում եմ երբ ամբողջ դասարանով մեր օրը անցկացնում ենք այդ սպիտակ ձյան մեջ՝ ձնագնդի խաղալով:

Եկավ հերթական ձմեռը բերելով հերթական ձյունը:

Ես առավոտյան արթնացա մոտավորապես ժամը ութին: Ճիշտ է շատ դժվար արթնացա, ընդհանրապես ես շատ դժվար եմ արթնանում: Չեմ սիրում ամեն առավոտ շուտ արթնանալ, բաժանվել իմ տաք անկողնուց այն էլ այդ ցուրտ ձմռանը, երբ արթնանում ես, վերմակդ վերցնում վրայիցդ ու սկսում ցրտից դողալ: Բայց միեւնույն է պետք է վեր կենալ որովհետեւ դպրոց պետք է գնալ:

Մի կերպ բաժանվեցի անկողնուցս եւ նայեցի ժամին տեսա որ արդեն շատ ուշ է, վազեցի լոգարան, այնպիսի արագությամբ, որ աշխարհահռչակ վագորդները գլուխները տվել են պատին: Մտա լոգարան արագ լվացվեցի՝ առաջինը լվանալով ձեռքերս, հետո երեսս, հետո ատամներս, ապա սրբիչով չորացրեցի ձեռքերս եւ անձեռոցիկով երեսս. անձեռոցիկով, քանի որ սրբիչի վրա փում են շատ բակտերիաներ, որոնք նպաստում են մաշկի որակի վատացման: Հետո վազեցի սենյակ ու սկսեցի ժամանակա ծախսել ամենահիմար, բայց միեւնույն ժամանակ աղջիկների համար շատ կարելու էտապի՝ օրվա շոր ընտրելու վրա: Բացեցի պահարանիս դռները եվ սկսեցի նայել մեկ բլուզների դարակին, մեկ տաբատների դարակին ու կարողացա կողմնորոշվել վերջապես. հագա մորաքրոջս նվիրած մոխրագույն սվիտերը եւ սեւ հասարակ տաբատ: Հետո սանրեցի մազերս, գնացի միջանցք հագա ձմեռային կոշիկներս, հետո հագա տաք բաճկոնս, քանի որ ձյուն էր եկել՝ հագա նաեւ ձեռնոցներս, գլխարկս եւ գնացի դուրս, ու մինչեւ հասա մեքենային քայլեցի իմ սիրած ճոճռան ձյան միջով: Այնքան եմ սիրում ճերմակ ձյունը եվ ձմեռը:

# BEGINNING

It was a regular school morning. It was winter. The first snow came at night. All things around were covered with a white blanket. I was driving to school, but I could find time to walk through that white and crunchy snow. I love white snow and winter so much. But what I love the most is our whole class spending the day in the white snow and throwing snowballs at each other.

Another winter came, bringing another snow.

I woke up at about eight o'clock that morning. I must admit I usually wake up with difficulty.

I hate waking up early every morning and leaving my warm bed. Especially when the winter is so cold that, when you get up and take the blanket off of you, you start shivering. However you still have to get up because you have to go to school.

Somehow that morning, I got out of bed, looked at the clock and noticed I was running very late. I ran to the bathroom, at such a speed that world-famous runners could have hit their heads on the wall. I went to the bathroom and washed quickly, first washing my hands, then my face, then my teeth, then I dried my hands with a towel and my face with a napkin. I used a napkin because many bacteria remain on the towel, which contributes to the deterioration of skin quality.

Then I ran back to my bedroom and started to waste my time on the stupidest, yet most crucial step in a girl's day: the choice of clothes. I opened my closet. First I opened the tops drawer, then the pant drawer, to finally decide on what to wear: a gray sweater that my aunt bought for me, with a pair of random black trousers.

Ես գնացի որպեսզի նստեմ մեքենա, սակայն մեքենա նստելուց առաջ ունեցա մանրուքի վրա հիմնված վեճ հայրիկիս հետ. ես գնացի, բացեցի դուռը. քանի որ մեքենան բավականին մոտիկ էր կանգնած պատին, իսկ ես նստեցի պատի կողմից, դուռը բացելիս շատ թեթեւ կերպով դիպավ պատին ինչը շատ ուժեղ բարկացրեց հայրիկիս, քանի որ նա իր մեքենան սիրում ու խնամում է, ասես իր սեփական երեխային խնամի: Նա սկզբում մի քիչ բարկացավ իմ վրա, ապա դուրս եկավ մեքենայից, որպեսզի տեսնի ինչ զսպվածք ստացավ մեքենայի դուռը, բայց բացելով դուռը նա ավելի ուժեղ այն հարվածեց պատին եւ արդյունքում ես դարձա այդ ամենի մեղավորը: Ես սկսեցի վիճվել հայրիկիս հետ.

— Պապ քո հարվածելուց հետո դռան ծայրի ներկը թափվեց, — մի կերպ համոզում եմ ես հայրիկիս.

— Աղջիկ ջան իմ հարվածելուց հետո ոչ մի բան չէր կարող լինել, դու արդեն այնպես էիր հարվածել, որ արդեն զսպվել էր, — ինձ փորձում էր համոզել հայրիկը:

Այդպես ես ու հայրիկը վիճված միմյանց հետ նստեցինք մեքենան, եկավ մայրիկը եւ գնացինք դպրոց: Դպրոցի մուտքի մոտ ես մայրիկին պատմում էի թե ինչ էր պատահել մինչեւ իր գալը, սակայն ոչ մի արդյունք. մայրիկը ասում էր նույն խոսքերը ինչ-որ հայրս էր ինձ ասում:

Ես մտա դպրոց եւ գնացի դեպի մեր դասասենյակ: Մենք առաջին ժամին պետք է գրեինք թեմատիկ աշխատանք քիմիա առարկայից եւ բոլորիս ասված էր չուշանալ դասից: Սակայն ես մտա դասարան եւ եկել էր ընդհամենը հինգ հոգի տասնչորս հոգուց: Եկավ քիմիայի ուսուցչուհին եւ թեսթերը բաժանելու ընթացքում զարմանալիորեն բոլորը սկսեցին հերթով մտնել պատճառաբանելով, թե դժվար էր սառույցների վրայով արագ գալ:

Մենք գրեցինք թեմատիկ աշխատանքը եւ մեր դասղեկը մտավ դասարան ու ասեց որ լուռ գնանք տուն, բայց մենք չէինք կարող տուն գնալ, քանի որ ձյուն էր եկել եւ մենք չէինք կարող ուղղակի բաց թողնել մեր ձնագնդի խաղալու հնարավորությունը եւ գնալ տուն: Մենք մեր դասղեկին ասացինք, որ խնդիր չկա մենք տուն ենք գնում, բայց բոլորով վազեցինք դուրս ձնագնդի խաղալու:

I combed my hair, went to the hallway to put on my winter boots, then my warm jacket because it was snowing, put on my gloves, and my hat to finally go outside. Before I got to the car I walked through my favorite crunchy snow. I love white snow and winter so much. I was about to sit in the car when I had a small argument with my dad. As I went to open the passenger seat door, which was quite close to the wall, it touched it slightly. This action made my father very angry, because he loves his car and takes care of it as if it was his own child.

At first he was a little angry with me so he got out of the car to assess the damage. But when he opened the door he hit it harder against the wall and as a result I became the culprit. I started arguing with my father.

“Dad, the paint on the edge came off after you hit the wall with the door,” I tried to persuade him.

“My dear, you had already hit it so badly and it was already damaged,” my father tried to convince me.

So Dad and I got into the car after our little argument. Mom joined us and we went to school.

At the entrance to the school, I was telling my mother what had happened before she came, but my efforts were in vain. My mum gave me the same speech my dad did.

I went into the school building and went straight to our classroom. First class of the day, we had a chemistry test and were cautious not to be late. When I entered the classroom only five people out of the fourteen of our class were there. Our chemistry teacher came in, started to distribute the tests, and as she was doing so, surprisingly, everyone who was late started to magically arrive, arguing that it was difficult to walk on black ice.

After the test, the master teacher came into the classroom and told us to go home in silence. But we could not agree because it was snowing and we could not just miss the opportunity to play with snowballs and go home. We told our master teacher that this was not a problem, that we would head home, but instead we all ran outside to play with snowballs.

Այս օրը դարձավ ճակատագրական Արսենի համար: Մեր դասարանից մի տղա հենց ինքը Արսենը սիրահարվել էր մեր զուգահեռ դասարանի Կարինեին, արդեն շատ երկար ժամանակ: Մենք բոլորով վազեցինք դուրս խաղալու. մեր հետ էր նաև Կարինեն: Մենք չորս աղջիկ էինք: Մենք աղջիկներով զբոսնում էինք եւ վայելում մեզ էր շրջապատող սպիտակ տեսարանը: Հանկարծ մեզ է մոտենում Արսենը.

— Կարինե, կարող ենք առանձնանալ, — մոտենալով մեզ հարցնում է Արսենը: Կարինեն մի փոքր երկվտեղվելով պատասխանում է, — Հա կարող ենք:

Արսենն ու Կարինեն միասին զբոսնում էին եւ զրուցում: Արսենը շատ էր սիրում Կարինեին եւ միայն նրա մասին էր մտածում: Նրան ոչ մեկ չէր հետաքրքրում, նրա համար միայն ինքն էր իր Կարինեի հետ:

— Կարինե ինձ թվում է դու արդեն գիտես, որ ես քեզ սիրում եմ ու շատ, կարծում եմ Աննան քեզ այդ մասին արդեն ասել է, — շատ գեղեցիկ սիրո խոստովանություն է անում Արսենը:

— Հա գիտեմ Արսեն, — մի փոքր ամաչելով ու կարմրած պատասխանում է Կարինեն: Նրանք տարվել էին միմյանցով եւ անգամ չէին նկատել որ մի ամբողջ դասարան

իրենց է հետեւում: Բայց նրանք հավերժ չէին կարող փախ միասին, քանի որ տասներեք հոգի իրենց էր սպասում: Նրանք եկան դե իհարկե Կարինեն եկավ մեզ պատմելու այն ինչ խոսացել են, Արսենն էլ գնաց տղաների մոտ, որպեսզի պատմի ինչ են խոսացել:

Ես ուղղակի տարված էի նրանցով, նրանք այնքան գեղեցիկ էին: Նայում էինք նրանց ու անընդհատ տանջվում այն մտածումներին թե ինչ է կատարվում նրանց միջև: Բայց ես գիտեի մի բան, որն այնքան էլ ուրախալի չէր, Կարինեն չէր տաժում նույն զգացմունքները Արսենի նկատմամբ, որը Արսենն էր տաժում նրա հանդեպ:

Սիրո խոստովանություններից հետո մենք բոլորով գնացինք ֆուտբոլի դաշտ ձնագնդի խաղալու:

Դասարանի աղջիկներից մեկը այդ սպիտակ ձյան միջով ուղղակի քայլելու փոխարեն իր հետ հավաքում եւ բերում էր մի մեծ ձյան կույտ: Այդ կույտը անիմաստ չէր եւ օգտագործվեց եւս մի

This day was becoming a decisive one for Arsen. Arsen was a boy from our class who had been in love with Karineh, a girl from the other class, for a very long time.

We all ran out to play. Karineh was also with us. We were four girls. We were walking together, enjoying the white scenery around us. Suddenly Arsen approached us.

“Karineh, can we be alone?” asked Arsen, still walking towards us.

Karineh answered a bit hesitantly, “Yes, we can.”

Arsen and Karineh started walking and talking together. Arsen was very much in love with Karineh and could only think about her. He was not interested in anyone else; only Karineh.

“Karineh, I guess you already know that I love you very much, I think Anna has already told you,” Arsen declared his flame.

“Yes, I know Arsen,” Karineh answered, blushing and a little embarrassed.

Arsen and Karineh were into their conversation so much that they didn’t notice the entire class was following them. But they could not stay in their bubble forever, as thirteen people were waiting for them. So they came back. Karineh came to tell us what had been said, and Arsen went to the boys to do the same.

I was just fascinated with them. They were so beautiful. We were looking at them and couldn’t help wondering what was going on between them. But I knew something that was not so pleasant: Karineh did not have the same feelings for Arsen as Arsen did for her.

After the confession, we all went to the football field to play with snowballs.

Instead of just walking through the white snow, one of the girls in the class picked up a large clump of snow. That clump was not pointless and was used for another very beautiful scene.



շատ գեղեցիկ տեսարանի համար: Կարինեն վերցնելով այդ ձյան կույտը հարվածեց Արսենի գլխին: Այդ պահը դարձավ շատ դեռահասների ծիծաղի պատճառ: Այդ մենք բավականին երկար ու լիաթուկ ծիծաղում էինք, իսկ այդ ընթացքում Արսենի ու Կարինեի հայացքները ինձ շեղեցին. ես սկսեցի գտնել սեր նրանց հայացքների մեջ: Այդ գեղեցիկ պահը ընդհատվեց դասարանի տղաների հարձակումով: Նրանք բոլորը գետնից հավաքեցին ձյուն եւ սկսեցին վազել մեր ետևից, իսկ մենք վազում էինք ինչքան ուժ ունեինք, բայց մենք չէինք կարող վազել այնքան որքան ուզում էինք, քանի որ ուժասպառ կլինեինք, չնայած որ, արդեն ուժասպառ էինք եղել, ստիպված կանգնեցինք: Կանգնելուն պես մենք նվեր ստացանք ձնագնդիկներ հասցված մեր երեսին:

Մենք այնքան ուրախ էինք, ասես փոքրիկ երեխաներ լինեինք, որոնք ուրախացել էին իրենց կյանքում առաջին անգամ ձյան փաթիլներ տեսնելուց: Բայց մեր այդ ամբողջ ուրախության մեջ ինձ միայն մեկ բան էր գրավում՝ Արսենի ու Կարինեի հայացքները որոնք ասես խաչվել

Taking that clump of snow, Karineh hit Arsen on the head. That moment made many teenagers laugh. Yes, we were laughing quite hard for a while, and during that time Arsen and Karineh's gazes distracted me. I started noticing the love in their eyes. That beautiful moment was interrupted by an attack from the boys in our class. They all picked up snow from the ground and started running after us. We ran as hard as we could, not as fast as we wanted because we would be exhausted, even though we were already exhausted so we had to stop. As soon as we got up, we received a wonderful gift: snowballs on our faces. We were so happy, as if we were little kids seeing snowflakes for the first time in their lives. But in all our joy, I was obsessed with only one thing: the looks that Arsen and Karineh shared, which seemed to engrave in my mind.



Sara Clamage

Էին միմյանց հետ: Նայում էիր շուրջդ ամբողջը ծածկված էր սպիտակով, եւ նայում էիր նրանց, ու հասկանում թե ինչքան անհոգ ու գեղեցիկ է կյանքը նրանց աչքերով: Արսենը մուգ կապույտ բաճկոնով էր, իսկ Կարինեն մուգ կանաչ: Նրանք գորշ գույներով էին հագնված, բայց այդ սպիտակ ձյան մեջ նրանց իրար հանդեպ սեր տածող հայացքները ծածկում էին նրանց հագուստի գորշությունը:

Բայց մի բան չէր թողնում, որ նրանց աչքերը շարունակ էին պահել նույն փայլը, ինչ մի քանի րոպե առաջ էր: Նրանց հայացքներն ուրիշ բան էին ասում, իսկ պահվածքն ուրիշ: Այդ ընթացքում Կարինեն ասես փախչեր Արսենից, ինչն էլ ինձ ամենաշատն էր ստիպում տխրել: Մենք բոլորս խաղում էինք մեր գորշ բաճկոններով այդ ճերմակ ձյան մեջ, առանց նայելու ում հարվածեցինք, ով ընկավ ձյան մեջ իր գորշ բաճկոնով, իսկ նրանք՝ Կարինեն ու Արսենը կարծես օտարացած լինեին, բայց միեւնույն է նկատում էիր սեր նրանց աչքերի մեջ, երկուսն էլ փայլում էին, իսկ մենք խաղում ու խաղում էինք մոռացած ամեն ինչ: Մենք այնպես էինք տարվել ձնով, որ մոռացել էինք ամեն ինչ, անգամ մարդկանց:

Օրը ցուրտ էր, սովորական ժամանակ մենք մրսում ենք այս եղանակին, բայց այս ձյունը, մեր երջանիկ դեմքերը եւ երկու հոգի մեզ մոռացության էին մատնել եւ մենք չէինք զգում այդ ցուրտն ու սառնությունը, նույնիսկ հակառակը մենք այդ ցրտին շոգում էինք, բայց, եթե այս ամենին նայենք ռեալ աչքերով, մեր շոգելու պատճառը շատ հասկանալի էր, դա մեր անմոռաց խաղի ու անընդհատ վազելու, միմյանց հետեւից ընկնելու, եւ անընդհատ շարժվելու արդյունքն էր: Բայց եթե նայենք վարդագույն աչքերով ինձ ստիպում էր շոգել նրանց հայացքները, որոնք միաժամանակ եւ այրում էին, եւ սիրում:

Բայց ինչքան էլ ես նայում էի նրանց ու հիանում նրանց փայլով, եւ պատկերացնում նրանց գեղեցիկ սիրո պատմությունը, մեկ է մի բան անխուսափելի էր՝ Արսենի սերը փոխադարձ չէր Կարինեի խոսքերով, բայց մեկ է բերանը ուրիշ բան կարող է ասել, իսկ սիրտը մեկ ուրիշ բան:

When you looked around, everything was covered in white. When you looked at them, you realised how carefree and beautiful life was through their eyes. Arsen was wearing a dark blue jacket and Karineh dark green. The rest of their clothes were gray, but in that white snow, their loving glances covered the gloom of their clothes.

Their eyes kept the same spark and nothing around could have changed that. Their body language was saying one thing, their eyes another. During that time, Karineh seemed to run away from Arsen, which was making me very sad. We all played with our gray jackets in that white snow, without looking at our targets, without paying attention to which 'gray jacket' fell into the snow. Karineh and Arsen, seemed to be alienated, but you could still notice the love in their eyes. They both had glimmering eyes as we were playing and playing, forgetting everything. We were so carried away by the snow that we forgot everything around, including people.

The day was cold. Normally we would be freezing in this weather, but with this snow, our happy faces and the two individuals who forgot about us, we did not feel the cold at all. On the contrary, we were hot in that cold. The real reason for that was our unforgettable games and constant running, chasing each other and constantly moving.

If I was naive, I would look in their eyes and see love and passion.

But no matter how much I stared, admired the spark and imagined their beautiful love story, one idea seemed inevitable to me: Arsen's feelings were not shared by Karineh, according to her words. But the tongue and the heart can sometimes speak different truths.

Ավարտեցինք մեր խաղը եւ որոշեցինք արդեն գնալ տուն, սակայն ոչ ոք չունէր ցանկություն տուն գնալու, բոլորս ուզում էինք վայելել ձյունը եւ նրանց: Բայց այսպէս թէ այնպէս մենք չէինք կարող անվերջ մնալ եւ վայելել ձյունն ու նրանց, եւ ստիպված՝ հոգով երջանիկ, սակայն տխուր ու հոգնած դեմքերով ամենքս գնացինք մեր տուն:

Մեր համար օրը ավարտվեց այսպէս, բայց այս օրը դարձավ նոր սկիզբ նրանց համար: Այո կդառնա նոր սկիզբ, որը չի ունենա ավարտ, ինչն էլ կստիպի շարժվել այնպէս ինչպէս սիրտդ կհրամայի, բայց միշտ չէ որ սրտի հրամանները լինում են տեղին: Միգուցէ Կարինէի խոսքերը այն է ինչ իր սիրտն է հրամայում, եւ այն ինչ նա զգում է, իսկ միգուցէ հակառակը:

Եկավ հերթական ձմեռը բերելով հերթական ձյունը:

We finished our game and decided to go home, although no one wanted to. We all wanted to play some more and hang with the new couple. But one way or another we could not stay indefinitely, enjoy the snow and them, so we all reached home, filled with joy, but with sad and tired faces.

That is how the day ended for us. This is how the day became a new beginning for them. Yes, it was a new beginning, with no ending, a beginning where the heart takes control, but the commands of the heart are not always clear. Maybe Karineh's words are what her heart commands, what she feels or maybe it's the total opposite.

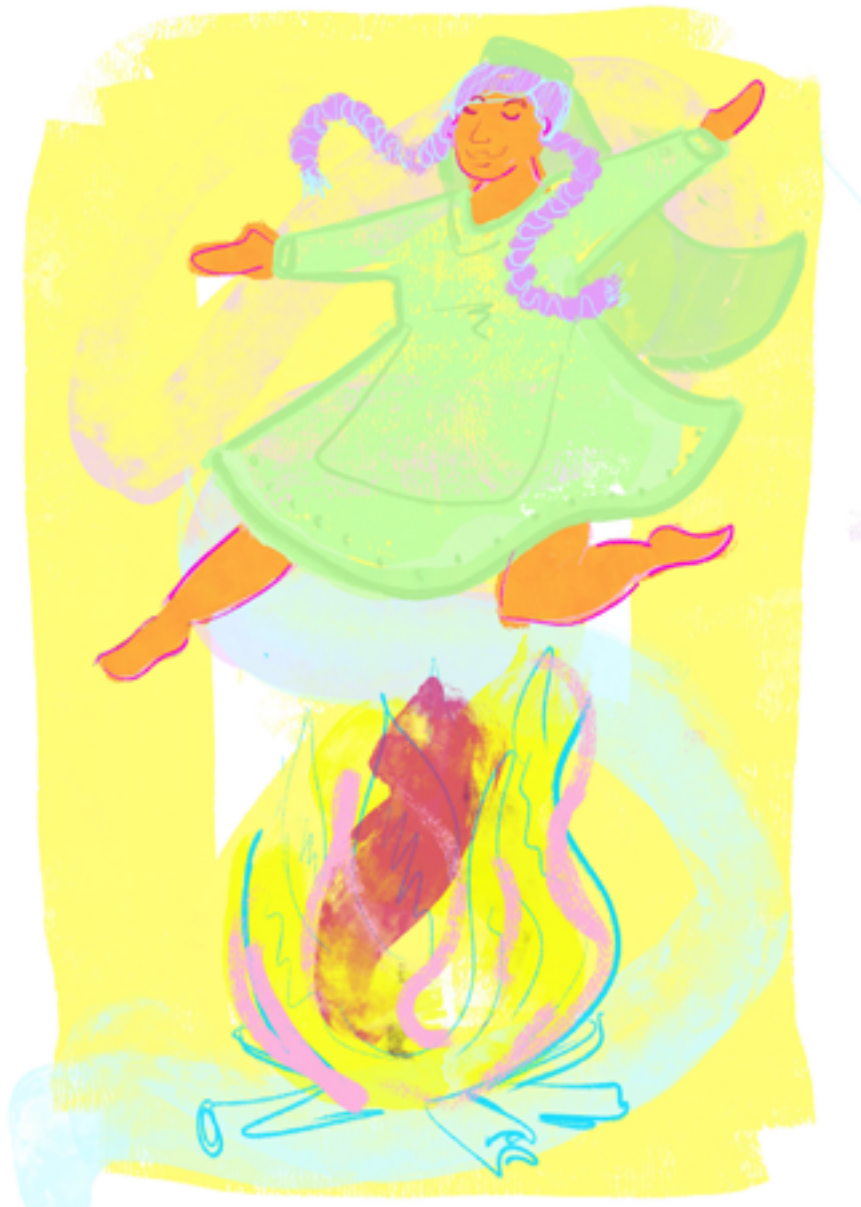
Another winter came, bringing another snow.

**Hasmik Sayadyan** was born in Armenia and lives in Yerevan. She is fourteen years old and attends Tumo Center of Technologies.

*Translated by Nour-Ani Sisserian*



**Sara Clamage** is a visual artist born and raised in New England, working in acrylics, collage, and digital illustration.



# ANOTHER

when i met you at the start of summer i didn't think i'd get to be with you through the end of fall.

together we walked into another winter, in our altered world, during an altered year, and now we're in the midst of spring where the մեղր begins to flow.

when i'm with you, i remember that beauty is still here.

several years ago I heard the phrase, "be like մեղր," and haven't gotten it out of my head since. When I feel hostility. be like մեղր. When I feel small. be like մեղր. When I feel resentful. be like մեղր. Don't get me wrong, all of our emotions matter and they can be dynamic, potent feelings that can be turned into energy, put into love and reconciliation. But sometimes a bad feeling is my heart telling me it needs more softness, more love, more attention. Does the heart not deserve it?

it is a question i don't know how to answer, so I will talk about the air. because you still listen, because in times like these to have you listen at all, i find my love growing, with your seasons, your fullness, your arrival.

*Translation notes:*

մեղր: *honey*

**Narek Mkrtoumian**





**Narek Mkrtoumian** (@arcfiles) is a first-generation Armenian, born in Abovian, Armenia. He is an urbanist and architectural photographer living in Los Angeles, CA. Currently, Narek is working on a master's degree in urban planning and public policy from the University of Illinois, Chicago. His work is inspired and reliant on exploring the built environment to discover new places + faces.



*Vowels of the Body* is a short video poem which explores the relationship of the body to the earth and a testament that as humans we live in a dialogical relationship with the tides and turnings of creation. As a site-specific dance artist I am interested in the relationship between inner and outer landscapes and how moving within the natural world forms words and worlds.

The poem, *Vowels of the Body* is included in my forthcoming book of poetry, *The Marrow of Longing*, which explores my Armenian identity and published by HARP Publishing in Nova Scotia, Canada, and will be available in May of 2021.

**CLICK HERE TO WATCH “VOWELS OF THE BODY”**

**Celeste Nazeli Snowber, PhD**, is a dancer, poet, writer, award-winning educator and a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in the Vancouver area of B.C., Canada. Celeste interweaves multidisciplinary forms in her performances and published works, and attention to embodied ways of inquiry has been central to Snowber’s scholarly and artistic work for over two decades. She

is the author of *Embodied inquiry: Writing, living and being through the body* as well as three collections of poetry. Her latest book of poetry, *The Marrow of Longing* explores the relationship to her Armenian identity. She creates site-specific performances of dance and poetry in the natural world and can be found at [www.celestesnowber.com](http://www.celestesnowber.com).

# APRICOT ORCHARD

*July 2nd, 1918*

Amaras walked through the long green grass barefoot as her light dress flowed in the wind. She sat under an apricot tree. The rush of the river nearby crashed against the eroded rocks and over the little pebbles. Mikael drew out a bright embroidered blanket on the long grass and they both laid on it with the sun in their faces.

Mikael laid on his side, leaning on his arm, looking at Amaras with the sun piercing his face. He wore a button down, white shirt that was loosely pulled over his black pants. Amaras lay on her back biting into a sweet apricot from the tree. Her dark hair looked golden as the sun shined down upon her curls that were spread on the rug. She squinted as she looked at Mikael's face smiling. His warm hand touched her cheek.

"Read to me," Amaras said closing her eyes, waiting for his voice to speak to her.

He opened the Daniel Varoujan book and flipped to the page they had left off. Clearing his voice, he began reading.

His voice trailed off in her head, like a blur. She only saw him and the apricot trees behind him. Armenian words were slowly recited out of his mouth, telling its own story.

Amaras turned her head to the other side and caught a glance at his leather book bag. She squinted as the sun hit her face and shed a red-orange blur in front of her. She was trying to make out the object that shone against the glare of the sun.

And with a shift of her body, the glare moved with her for a moment allowing her to catch a glimpse of the sparkling object. She turned her head back, laying straight on the rug. She smiled to herself and her cheeks blushed immediately.

Mikael was still reading out loud, reciting the poems. When the sun came up to a certain point, they both sat up and gathered a few apricots, fitting them into Mikael's bag.

As she stood up, Amaras patted down all the grass from her white dress. Mikael grabbed her waist from behind, and carried her, running towards the river.

After getting drenched in water, they started leaving the orchard.

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THAT SHONE AGAINST THE GLARE OF  
THE SUN.**

Mikael put his arm over her shoulder as they walked back from the orchards to their homes.

When Amaras arrived at her house, she saw her tatik humming to herself as she placed shirts onto a twine rope that led from one corner of the roof to a tree.

"Tatik, why are you out so early?"

"Why are *you* out this early?" she asked, continuing her work.

Amaras looked at herself, drenched in water.

"Swimming..."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"No." Grandmother Antaram said, stretching out that last vowel like she was reassuring herself.

"What do you mean no?"

"Ehh" she sighed, "You were with Mikael, *no*?"

Amaras stopped and looked down at her bare feet. She was still holding onto her shoes.

"Why did you walk all the way here barefoot?" Grandmother Antaram continued. "There are sharp things in the soil."

"I didn't want to get my shoes wet."

"Okay. Then get your feet cut up."

Amaras laughed.

"So, tell me, how's Mikael doing?"

"Good." Amaras nodded to herself looking at the stone steps in front of her that lead to her front door.

"Seeing you with Mikael is the happiest sight I've seen for years; the happiest sight I think we've *all* seen for years."

Amaras had a somber look cross her face and sighed. Grandmother Antaram put her arm around Amaras and led her inside.

It wasn't always like this. They didn't always carry this trauma with them in their everyday lives, this scare, this lack of faith in people.

*April 28th, 1915*

It was already tense in the month of April, with rumors of Turkish military officials going and pillaging houses, burning them down, taking anyone with the last name ending in 'ian' out of their homes to slaughter. All Armenians felt the tension, but Amaras's family did not expect it to happen to them so soon.

On the night of April 28th, Amaras and her three siblings, Artur, Lilit, and Sevan were at the theatre with their grandmother Antaram.

Back in their house, Amaras's family, including her parents, Aida and Sarkis, as well as three of her grandparents were playing nardi and drinking tea. All of a sudden there was loud banging on the door. Before anyone could make anything out of the situation, three young Turkish officers broke into their precious home. Screaming in terror, Aida grabbed ahold of her husband's shoulder and stood behind him. Everyone's face went pale as they stared at the three officers in uniform. The three men started shouting at them and grabbed ahold of Aida's parents. Aida screamed for her mother as Sarkis pulled her back. Her voice broke as she tried to make out words to her parents who were being held down by the officers. Detained and in no way of escaping, the Turkish officers aggressively pulled Aida's parents out of the house.

One officer remained in the house with a sly grin on his face, cursing at them with Turkish words.

He walked around the room, touching precious objects, family pictures, pointing people out and smashing the glass to the floor. With every touch, Sarkis flinched. His father fell to his knees, holding his arms out in front of him, praying out loud.

Sarkis was hugging Aida as tightly as possible as they watched a stranger ruin their home in front of them. When the two soldiers came back alone, they saw Sarkis's father kneeling and crying on the floor.

"What's he doing?" one officer said in Turkish, as he pointed to Sarkis's father.

The other one laughed.

"Your God isn't going to HELP!" they shouted in the old man's face as he closed his eyes.

Sarkis looked at the soldiers, and back at his father; the sight couldn't be worse. This shattered him to a million pieces. A tear rolled down his face, looking at his father, he couldn't help but compare his vulnerable state to the tall officers in front of him.

The three officers grabbed ahold of Sarkis's father, who was unwilling to comply with their commands. He managed to make the sign of the cross and kiss a cross that was hanging from their walls as the officers pulled him out of the house.

Sarkis broke, he turned his face away from the door, and this time, Aida was there to comfort them, as they had just lost their parents.

Sarkis and Aida managed to hide away and made it to Antaram and their children at the theater where they all escaped that night, Mikael's family also escaped with them. A gruesome, month-long journey lay ahead of them. Where they finally, finally found refuge in Gyumri.

*July 2nd, 1918*

Amaras laid on her bed that she shared with her sister. She turned to the side where Sevan laid, dangling her wet feet off the bed. She stroked her sister's hair; she was sleeping peacefully that early morning.

Amaras then walked to the living room where her mother sat on the couch drinking tea. Amaras poured a cup of tea for herself as well and joined her mother in silence.

Aida was very beautiful. She had shoulder length dark hair that was usually pulled back into a low bun. She had thick eyebrows, high cheekbones, and a low, warm and loving voice. She always wore ankle-length dresses and a golden cross around her neck. The cross was given to her from her parents before they were taken away.

"Mam," Amaras broke the silence "How did you know you were ready when you met papa?"

Aida looked at Amaras with a tired look. "What do you mean?"

"Well, how did you know that papa was the one, and that you were ready to marry him?"

Aida took a deep breath and drank her tea. Once she finished, she gave Amaras that tired expression once again: "I knew because of the way he treated me, and the way I felt around him when we were together."

"What was that feeling like?"

"One I cannot explain, and one I haven't felt in a long, long time." Aida looked up at the wall somberly, where her parents' photo hung.

"I have a feeling like that too. One that I cannot explain."

"With Mikael?"

"Yes."

Aida took a deep breath and leaned back into the couch. She looked at her daughter and held her hand tightly. "Then you know," she smiled, closing her eyes.

Amaras smiled with her, closing her eyes and leaning into the deep couch.

**"I KNEW BECAUSE OF THE WAY  
HE TREATED ME, AND THE WAY  
I FELT AROUND HIM WHEN WE  
WERE TOGETHER."**

The next morning, she was to see Mikael again at the river. She woke early in the morning, and to her surprise Sevan wasn't in the bed. She's probably in the bathroom, Amaras thought to herself. Wearing a long blue silk dress, Amaras grabbed her cream-colored shawl and ran out quietly not to wake anyone.

She arrived at the apricot orchard and saw Mikael wearing a white cotton button down shirt. He was wearing a dark brown coat, and his hair loosely curled around his ears. She ran to him as he embraced her in his arms. She put her head on his chest and they stayed like that for a while, swaying back and forth. She looked up.

"I missed you."

He kissed her cold cheek and she fell back into his arms.

He let go and accompanied her with one arm to the river side.

She looked at their usual sitting area under the large

apricot tree. "Wait, I thought we were going to read like usual," she said, pointing to the tree. "The rug isn't here, and neither are your books."

"Not today," he smiled.

Amaras looked back up at him.

The sun was sort of hidden behind the clouds this morning, but still gave enough shine that made Amaras's face glow.

They stood in the orchard amongst the golden apricots that peeked through the leaves. Mikael held her hands in front of him. From his brown coat pocket, he pulled out a delicate gold ring with a sparkling red stone.

Amaras gasped. She immediately put her arms around him, shouting with happiness. Mikael laughed and put the ring on her finger. She looked at it in astonishment as joy radiated through her heart.

From behind the thick grove of apricot trees, Amaras's parents, siblings, and grandmother Antaram ran out in joy. Sevan ran towards Amaras where she was embraced with a warm hug. Artur, who was already married, congratulated Mikael and they hugged one another. Grandmother Antaram beamed in excitement and hugged her granddaughter so tightly.

This was the first moment in four years that they had all felt a way that they couldn't describe. A way that Amaras felt when she was with Mikael, a way that Aida had felt when she was with Sarkis, a way that they had all felt before 1915. They all stood in the apricot orchard embodying the happiness that had been bottled away for too long.

**Ani Sargsyan** is 16 years old and lives in Fresno, California. She has been actively participating in Armenian events within her community. Writing is one of her passions alongside Armenian dance. From a young age, she has had a deep love for her culture.

This realistic fictional piece showcases the strength of a family that overcame the adversity during the Armenian Genocide and not only survived but was reborn.



# HPARTUT'YUN

*Amot* was one of the first words I learned in Armenian.  
*Amot* is what I breathe, *amot* is the pain that stifles me  
As I tell my new friend Arminé that no, I do not speak Armenian.  
*Amot* is the flush that creeps into my cheeks when I  
Can't piece together the murmuring cadence of Armenian voices  
Around me. I try desperately to interpret the words  
But they are slippery, and flow between my ears, unintelligible.  
*Amot* is what I feel when I look in the mirror, see my wispy eyebrows  
That should be strong like raven's wings, when I dust off old photos of  
My grandparents and don't see myself reflected in them.

*Amot* is what I feel when I rifle through my grandmother's old kimonos and  
The numerous evidences of a life in a tiny island across the sea, a life  
That is more familiar to me than my father, more familiar than the  
*Lahmujun* he once made for me when I was ten, more familiar than the  
Beloved mountains and pink sand of what should be my homeland.  
*Amot* is knowing that I'll always be a glass half full, never enough for  
The elderly men at the Armenian festival who say I must be Turkish,  
Never enough for my father and his brother, who say I look  
Almost, almost like their mother, Anna.

But I am not Anna, I do not speak Armenian, I have never been to Armenia.  
Yet I make the long drive to Watertown, I kneel before the graves  
Of my Fenerjian ancestors, I tenderly brush my fingers on the  
Script I cannot comprehend, and I feel their dreams blossom inside of me.  
I absorb my friend Arminé like a sponge, eagerly adopting her memories  
Of the motherland as she scribbles out the Armenian alphabet  
In my notebook and sounds out the letters for me.

I find Armenian accounts on Instagram, on Twitter. I join an Armenian genealogy group on Facebook, and I retrace my ancestors' Frightened, hopeful steps to Massachusetts. I meet hundreds of Armenians in the digital realm, Armenians who stretch out their Arms through the screen, caress my cheek, and call me *kooryrig*. I read Hayk the Great's Wikipedia page; I weep as I read the translated Poetry of Zabel Yesayan.

I sunbathe in the collective grief and joy of my people, soaking up What it means to be Armenian. I look in the mirror again, and Smile at my big, bumpy nose, my deep-set eyes, my high Cheekbones. I realize that I am indeed a glass half full, With room left to learn, to bite into a flaky slice of *kadayif*, To train my limbs to repeat the steps to ancient dances, To listen to my father's childhood stories.

*Hpartut'yun*; I search for "pride in Armenian" on Google, And stare at the transliteration. I savor the word on my tongue, Testing out the jagged consonants as I whisper. It is a difficult word, A hard word to describe a hard emotion for a half-Armenian girl to feel. *Amot* is so easy. But I am done with easy, and I am done with shame. *Hpartut'yun* is what I feel when I remember that I am a part of a people Who would not be destroyed. *Hpartut'yun* is my Japanese mother Gifting me Armenian decorative bowls she found. *Hpartut'yun* is making *Baba ganoush* for my uncle, the fragrant scent wafting through a kitchen Brimming with eggplant and laughter.

*Hpartut'yun* is knowing that I am not Anna. I am Deanna, A glass half full; I am partly Anna, but I am wholly myself.

**Deanna Kallian** is a recent college graduate from Massachusetts. She enjoys writing, painting, and playing with her three dogs. She plans to attend graduate school in the fall and eventually become a high school English teacher.

# REBIRTH

When does a rebirth happen?

It depends on what meaning you give it.

One perspective is that something needs to end, something needs to die, something needs to pass for there to be a rebirth.

Rebirth may be a letting go, a release of that which no longer serves you now. Otherwise, it may not be a rebirth but just a cosmetic fix or change. Change is not necessarily transformational. Also, rebirth is not necessarily about changing; it may also be about a reconnecting to who we already are but have forgotten.

Rebirth may be the new possibility when you make a choice to restart again, to begin again, when you decide to choose again, and more specifically choose love again.

Another perspective may be that the something may be a part of who or how you once were, or it may be something or someone you have outgrown.

For instance, take relationships. Often when we come to an end of a relationship, whether that is a divorce or a breakup from a committed relationship, we focus on the ending of that relationship. I invite us to reframe that perspective and be willing to see this from a different perspective, to see it as exactly how the relationship was to be; it has run its course, and anything further may cause misery, unnecessary hardship more so than the pain of moving forward from it. Or it may be that we see it as a new beginning, Your Rebirth for a new life to begin. Or even better yet, a reconnecting to who you truly are at your core. Where you may have gone off course, you may have been distracted and fallen victim to who you are supposed to be, how you were supposed to live your life based on other people's or society's expectations. Instead of just being who you are, learn from the experience you had, learn, grow, evolve, and transform; ultimately the goal is to transcend all forms and be the lightness of your being, to be the love that you are, and to share your unique gifts that have been inherently given to you.

To live with this mindset, we need to acknowledge: do the work and process the pain, the hurt, the devastation and whatever you're feeling whether it's sadness, anger, guilt, shame, unworthiness, insecurity, etc. We need to bring our attention to them. We need to feel them, see them through, release and clear them, bring them to a completion in order to heal. Then we may be ready to start again. Therein is Our Rebirth.

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**WE PLACE OUR OWN LIMITATIONS  
ON OURSELVES. REBIRTH MAY BE  
A BREAKING FREE FROM AND A  
LIBERATION OF OURSELVES FROM  
OUR OWN BARRIERS, ONE STONE  
AT A TIME.**  
~~~~~

It is spring and with this season we are reminded of starting over again, a new beginning: The Rebirth. All is anew again, from nature and beyond.

Rebirth may be a reconnecting with who we are at our core, not our persona but our soul – working through the layers of distractions, our too-many responsibilities, our judgments, our avoidances, our suppression, conditionings, or pretending like nothing needs to be transformed.

We have an opportunity at any time of course, not just this season, to unravel, to dig deeper and see who we are and who we are not. If we don't like who we see, then we may consider looking at how we may be different, so when we look at ourselves we actually like who we see again. Who we are impacts who we invoke into our lives; be aware of the self, first and foremost.

At any time, we can start again, anew. At any time. The only element in our way is our own ego mind, our

fears, our conditionings, our patterns. When things in our life are not flowing consider that we are getting in the way of what life is manifesting through us. We place our own limitations on ourselves. Rebirth may be a breaking free from and a liberation of ourselves from our own barriers, one stone at a time.

We do need to acknowledge or be aware of ourselves and our choices. Awareness is key. We cannot be aware when we are busy with our involvement in our physical world only. That is of course part of our human experience, and we do need to also give ourselves the just as valuable livelihood of connecting with our spirit. As we are all spiritual, but we don't all practice our spirituality. This is not about being religious or any denomination or dogma. This is simply connecting on a deeper level with ourselves, with higher consciousness.

So many people were experiencing so many events of falling apart, loss in many forms and ways, breakdowns if you will. Trust that the breakdowns are not happening to us but for us. It may not feel that way at the moment we are experiencing it, but once all falls into place again—and once we have had time to digest and process our grievances, once there is a breathing space, and we've had a chance to look around, look within, look closer to what has been—there is an opportunity, an opening for us to become aware of the lessons, the growth, evolution and ultimately our transcendence. As we may know, or may have heard, we are not given a challenge, a pain, if we are not ready for it. As hard and difficult

or unfair as it may seem and feel, we are ready for it. But oftentimes we get into our head, our judgment of “why me?” If we did not experience the breakdowns, we would not experience the breakthroughs. If we did not go through the pain, the challenges, we would not experience the Rebirth.

The challenge is we all have an attachment to our identity. That is part of being human. We have a tight grip on what we have been known for. At some point in time, you may feel misaligned. It may be a scary realization because you're faced with the dilemma of loosening the grip, and the role you have been playing up to this point, the not knowing what that will lead to, the uncertainty, the unknown is unnerving to our ego mind. The protection mechanism kicks into high gear to not jeopardize what we have come to know as being secure and safe. We think up to this point: I was this person, doing this and being that, now I'm not? What will I do with myself? Who will I be then? How will I live my life? It's the years of conditionings that we would need to decondition. This is difficult and it is possible. Our willingness is everything here. When we are willing to walk through the fear, then the possibility will come to be. It is not easy. It does take commitment, consistency, compassion, and courage. And with these factors, the new life, new breath comes through that was not there before. Hence, our Rebirth.

**Nora Boghossian** is a paralegal by profession. As a way of being of service she leads a support group for women divorced, separated, or broken up from committed relationships, as well as offers one-on-one facilitating sessions. She contributes as a writer and enjoys photography and nature. She currently resides in Los Angeles. You can find her work here:

[Meetup Support group](#)

[Blog – Ecstatic heART & Soul Coaching blog](#)

[Article](#)

## DEEP DIVE

Jeff was

a

man

who

felt the weight of the

world on his shoulders.

He was a desk-jockey for a large corporation, and

there was literally nothing at all dangerous or even significant

about his work. And so, despite the healthy 401k, he constantly asked:

doing?" Exploring, he decided one day. "That's what I should be doing." So he quit his job and got an

internship at a submarine company. When they needed someone to test

volunteered. Turned out, Jeff was so good at it they tasked him with

an experimental sub to the bottom of the Mariani Trench.

"Mariani," he thought, "that would make a great name

for a tropical drink." Into the sub he went

and down he

dropped.

"What else should I be

the subs, he

piloting

At sea level, the air

surrounding us

pushes on our bodies

at 14.5 psi. For every

33 feet Jeff dropped

down into the blue,

the pressure went up

by 14.5 psi. He watched

the sunlight fade away and

the blue get darker and darker

until it turned blacker than

the gaskets lining his porthole.

When he finally

hit the bottom

of the trench, the

pressure had climbed

to 15,750 psi.

The weight of the world was

literally on his shoulders.

Jeff looked at the strange creatures lurking and wondered about the submarine company's 401k.

A  
man  
built a cabin  
far off in the woods.  
He was sure the whole  
world was against him, that  
it was all going to hell very quickly  
with nothing left to  
offer him. What he  
didn't realize was that  
he'd locked himself in  
with a beast: his own  
heart.

**Peter Hajinian** is a writer whose short stories have been published in a number of online magazines including *SPLIT*, *The Heavy Table*, and *Halfway Down the Stairs*. From his work in advertising and drawing inspiration from Oulipo writing techniques, he is interested in how form and structure

can reshape the reading experience. He is an active member of the Armenian Numismatics & Antiquities Society, and current co-host of "Podmootiun", an Armenian history podcast. He is currently working on a novel about Armenian-American identity and Armenian history.

# ՀՈՎԸ

## THE WIND

Հովը փչեց մի անգամից,  
Ու իր հետ տարավ ամեն ինչ:  
Մի բան մնաց անշարժ,  
Բայց էդ էր հազար արժ:

The wind whirled in suddenly.  
With it, it took everything instantly.  
However, one thing remained still,  
Its value being as strong as its will.

**Varak Ghazarian** is a 26-year-old Armenian-American from Los Angeles who attended an everyday Armenian school his entire life. After receiving an undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley, he volunteered from August 2017– August 2018 with Birthright Armenia in various capacities. While

in Armenia, he was in Artsakh for a month, where he spoke to teenagers in schools near the border of Azerbaijan about fundamental topics of health. Being in Armenia inspires him to freely write and opens up a door of imagination which was closed off elsewhere.



