

HYEBRED

FALL 2021 ISSUE 10



MAGAZINE

Cover photo by Armine Jarahyan

MASTHEAD

Rafaella Safarian, *editor-in-chief, design editor*

Gayane Iskandaryan, *fiction/nonfiction editor*

Nour-Ani Sisserian, *film/music editor*

John Danho, *poetry editor*

Nanor Vosgueritchian, *art/photography editor*

Silva Emerian, *copyeditor*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our tenth issue! Our submission call asked Armenian artists to send us their best work—an attempt to compose an unbridled yet potent issue sans theme. These contributors did not disappoint. Prepare to laugh, cry, think, learn, and just . . . feel.

The past year and a half has been tiresome and dark. But we hope that you experienced some moments of light. Many of us used these turbulent times to do what we do best: create. Whether by writing poetry or stories, directing films, drawing, photographing, or even performing comedy acts, we Armenian artists are making our mark in this day and age. Although many great Armenian writers, artists, musicians, and directors precede us, we are paving our own paths to artistic greatness—just scroll down and you'll see.

Thank you very much for reading.

Sincerely,

Rafaella Safarian
Editor-in-Chief

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Meghri Sarkissian	4	Elen Nahapetyan	65
Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian	5	Karine Khachatryan	66
Alethia Grishikian	10	Nareh Ayvazyan	67
Hannah Yagmur Gursoy	13	Holly Malkasian	69
Anna Matevosyan	14	Anashe Barton	79
Liana Minassian	23	Michael Minassian	80
David Kherdian	25	Charents Apkarian	82
Naré Hovakimyan	26	Arman Ghaloosian	83
Aida Zilelian	28	Sebastian Sarkisian	85
Interview with Julie & Kristina Asriyan	38	Tatevik Galoyan	86
John and Zepure	48	Nourp	88
Nancy Agabian	49	Meg Aghamyan	92
Narek Zakharyan	56	Emily Avakian	94
Levon Kafafian	57	Book review of Celeste Nazeli Snowber's <i>The Marrow of Longing</i>	95
Juliana Marachlian Nersessian	60	Armine Jarahyan	98
Jane Partizpanyan	61	Seroun Mouradian	100
Sarah Elgatian	63	Contributors' Notes	103

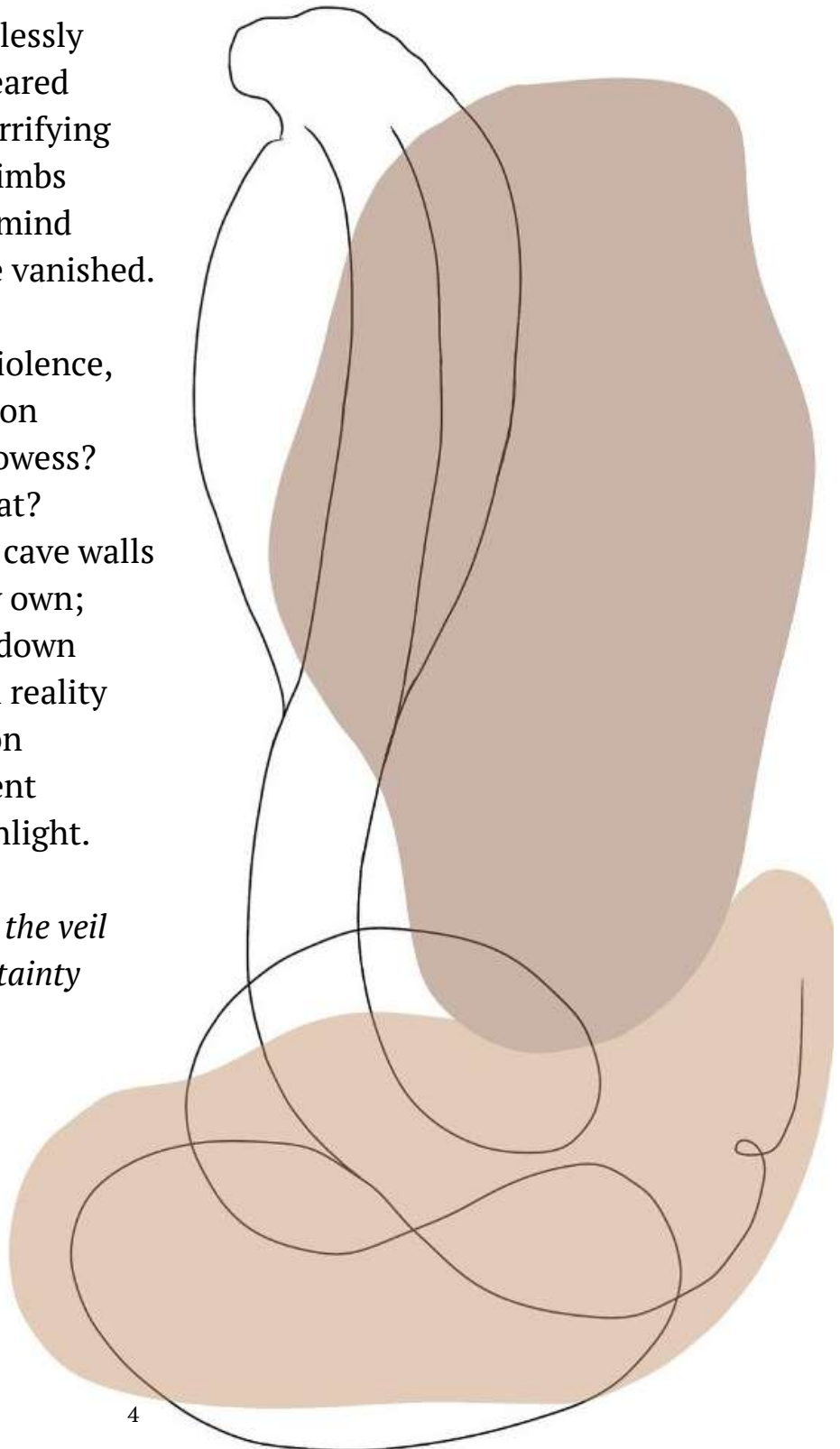
COBRA

Meghri Sarkissian

Narrow, lurid road winding endlessly
and in my path, a creature appeared
long and slender, beautifully terrifying
gaze paralyzing my weakened limbs
and disconnecting my ravaged mind
from a body that had long since vanished.

Was I looking into the face of violence,
a hallucinatory, carnal suggestion
threatening my own warlike prowess?
Or was it perhaps more than that?
Mockery of the shadows on the cave walls
that I had named and called my own;
its forked tongue whittling me down
setting me free from a deceitful reality
where I am but a volatile illusion
reflected in the gems of judgment
that glower in the ghostly moonlight.

*and thus can strength lift the veil
that had concealed uncertainty*



THE LUXURY OF PINE NUTS

Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian

Remnants of a civil war, still haunting generations

My Mom used to hide pine nuts in the far-right corner of our freezer. There was usually a kilo or more neatly tucked away in the freezer behind the pepper paste, dried tomatoes, boiled chick peas, and peas. Almost always, the freezer was used as just another compartment, as there was no electricity.

I have always had a thing for nuts, walnuts, pine nuts, and cashew nuts. There is something majestic about eating pine nuts on their own or paired with cashew nuts. It's intriguing how these little beings can be in salads, hommos, kufta, kibbeh bil saniyeh and even meghli [a sweet dish]. The trick is not to include too many, so that when you find them dancing between your teeth, you savor each bite. Of course, whenever I wanted to eat from the cache of pine nuts in the freezer, my Mom and my Horkour [Dad's sister] would reprimand me: "Nanig, these are not ours, you know that. These are for Digin [Mrs.] Zahra." So it was not enough for Digin Zahra to occupy my room for years, she had also started infiltrating our fridge. This occupation seemed serious. Digin Zahra used to live on the sixth floor of our building, and for many months and even years during the civil war, she stayed at our place, sleeping in my sister's bed. As a child, I wondered why she decided to bring her pine nuts along with her into our house. Did she feast on them after we went to sleep? Did she munch on a handful while watching the news? Did she not believe in sharing her pine nuts with the hosts?

December 2009

When my Mom passed away in 2007, my Horkour took it upon herself to train me in the kitchen. I did not really care for the training, but I enjoyed her stories and bonding with her. She told me stories of her childhood in Kaladouran-Kessab, of Khatoun Nene, the trees, the mountains, and the sea. One Saturday in mid-November, after a particularly

hectic week at work, Horkour came over to help me make kufta. In their language, Kessabtsis—people of Kessab—call kuftas “kelour.” These are oval-like meat balls, composed of fine bulghur [cracked wheat] and meat for the outer layer, and stuffed with minced meat, onion, and of course pine nuts. For Kessabtsis, adding pine nuts or walnuts is a must and a necessity, to bless those tiny beings with that extra flavor of class, happiness, and reassurance. My Horkour smiled, as her fingers worked magic with the kuftas, and proudly proclaimed: “As long as we can integrate pine nuts within our kuftas, we are still fine.” As I opened the fridge on that day to give my Horkour some pine nuts to add to the stuffing, she giggled to herself, claiming victory: “I cannot believe you actually believed that those pine nuts, many years ago, were Digin Zahra’s.” I could feel my ears growing red and somehow continued sipping my coffee. As her hands worked masterfully, opening the kuftas, she noticed my ears. “You know, we could not get pine nuts during the war; roads were closed most of the time...there were explosions, bombs, so much insecurity. At first, it started out as a joke, when your Mom and I decided to tell you that the pine nuts were Digin Zahra’s. It was the only way to keep you and your sister away from those little nuts, as you loved them so much!” I felt betrayed. After all, I had actually believed that those pine nuts were not ours, and I had respected the privacy of an intruder in our house. Even after losing my Mom, I had made sure that whenever I bought pine nuts I stored them in the same place in the freezer. What hurts me more about the pine nut displacement is the little time I had with my Mom. There were so many secrets that remained undisclosed. There was just not enough time for Mama to share with me all her stories, dreams, and secrets.

July 30, 2021

We have just gotten paid. Last month, I had trouble withdrawing my salary from the bank. When I called the bank, they told me that there is a “new” limit as to how much we can withdraw even in Lebanese Liras. This month, Raffi—my husband— and I have decided to use our cards at the supermarket and to keep the cash for emergency matters. We drive to Supermarket Spinneys, Ashrafieh, close to Mar Mitr church. Once we have our fever checked, we start exploring the aisles. We count the zeros quietly. We each have a short list, and we are on a mission to get the most affordable items.



Photography by Anashe Shahbazian Barton

One man near the oil stand obsesses over cooking oil. He asks us a couple of times what the best deal is. I want to disclose to him that as a matter of fact, there are no better deals. All deals have failed. The brand that we used to buy for 20,000 LL only a year ago is now 140,000 LL. Instead, I just urge him to count the price per liter. His face looks pale and his eyebrows have curved up in surprise. He keeps on asking us questions about the quality. Unsatisfied with my answers, he asks me if the color of the oil looks fine. “We hear so many things...You think they added some other kind of oil? Car oil? The color looks so different.” After trying to convince him that this cannot be car oil for over five minutes, we just walk away. We don’t want to buy oil anymore. I know this gentleman is falling apart. If he gets paid 1,000,000 LL, then he will need to pay 1/10th of his salary just to buy cooking oil. In the background, I still hear him talking to himself and counting the price per liter. He has also been counting the zeros.

“It’s going to get worse,” Raffi mumbles. What has happened to his optimism, I wonder?

Another woman spends more than half an hour in front of the milk stand. She asks me if we have kids. I tell her no. She says: “Niyyelkon [lucky you]...you don’t have to worry about milk.” Her comment stabs me like a knife, but I know she is suffering. She tells me about her son, who cannot drink any other type of milk other than Dano. “So little for 200,000 LL.” She explains about her son’s constipation episodes, her attempts to find cheaper milk, her responsibility as a mother. Her hair is tied up in a bun, dark circles drilling her under-eyes, no concealer or cream. Her red nail polish is chipped from the edges and as she reads the labels and drops cans, she tries to chip them off even more—completely oblivious to corona threats. Her pain and the pain of so many others in this supermarket, even the people working there, are the same.

I remember how during the civil war, I used to hear many of our neighbors discuss benefits of Lexotanil and Xanax. Neighbors assumed roles of physicians and prescribed medications to each other. Even some pharmacists gave out such medications without any prescription. One lady, Tante Selwa, who visited us during ceasefires, used to refer to it as: “Lexo-Taline!” My sister and I would giggle so much when she came over and insisted that the best cure for an indifferent husband was a Lexo-Taline pill. Truth varies during wars. Thirty years after the supposed end of the civil war, as a nation, we are even deprived of the momentary amnesia and fake serenity that Xanax and Lexo can provide. The pharmacies are now out of not only Lexotanil, Xanax, Prozac, but also aspirin, Panadol, Plavixx.

Going to the supermarket has become such an ordeal. We have to buy using our cards, because we can only withdraw a certain amount of cash every month from our accounts.

Yes, our money sits in the banks while we run around like zombies in comatose states, trying to find out ways to make extra income in fresh dollars, because anything else does not matter. We try to outsmart the system, by buying the cheapest Kleenex—almost brown and coarse—by not frying food anymore, claiming that it is healthier. Finally, we abide by what our nutritionists used to tell us: measure your oil. We somehow mix vinegar with essential oil, and by following some crazy recipe on YouTube, we pride ourselves in homemade detergents.

Remembering that we have a friend coming over, I find myself in front of the Rifai stand and enjoy the enticing smell of mixed nuts. Well, at least smelling them is still for free. I remember that I have not bought walnuts, nuts, or pine nuts for a while. “How much is the snawbar [pine nuts]? One kilo of s nawbar,” I ask the lady at the stand. She inspects me from head to toe and then writes something on a small piece of paper. She asks me again: “One kilo?” And I wonder if this is a treasure hunt that we are playing. Then, recomposing her stature, she says: “Two.” “Two? Two what? Why don’t you just write the prices as you used to?” I hear myself speaking louder, feeling agitated. “The prices change every day, sometimes every hour.” Silence. “Million.” Silence. “Two Million.”

I want to laugh out loud. I want to laugh out loud and then hide in one corner, maybe pretend I am sleeping beauty, and then wake up when all of this is over: the exploitation, the theft, the hyper-inflation and the corruption. I want to run all the way back to the eighties and tell my mom that I know now why she hid those nuts in the freezer and why she pretended that they were not ours. I wish she had hidden more, a lot more, because right now, I just want to fill up my palms with pine nuts, and swallow them, without even chewing. One kilo of pine nuts is half my salary. Raffi is right: things will get worse. On our way out of the supermarket, I feel the pain and the crushing crescendo of parents hushing their children—refusing to buy the last-minute chocolates, of pads that now cost 45,000 LL, of tiny bottles of olive oil for 60,000 LL. Just enough for one salad bowl.

In the car, we put the AC on at its maximum. We know that soon, when we get back home, there will be no electricity, so no AC. We enjoy the five-minute ride back to our apartment. A few bags more and one and a half million less.

~

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

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO LOVE,

Alethia Grishikian

swaddled in earth dying under feet that kick and walk and click and run that kiss that rock that
spin that hum to the epitome Alethia | Armenia lost gaze of the beholder riding shoulders in a blaze bluer than blue
searching for truth and home over and over

how am I supposed to wake up to you falling asleep how am I supposed to clean up when no one is clean how am I
supposed to keep up when girls are prettier white girls wittier grim reaper yes, I've seen her smoke to fill the
hollowing smile through sea salt eyes watch the turkish confining the smell of coffee

the cough will follow lungs borrowing air barely

standing like a man

/ carried

understanding like a man /

buried

How am I supposed to be the breeze on your cheek pavement under feet bicycle seats offering what you
are and what you're not a part of something greater than my leave

How am I supposed to love?

From,

Underneath

ANCESTORS

Alethia Grishikian

Ancestors don't have to speak
when you have poetry
the kind in flavoring
the kind in anguish
the kind in food as a love language
pleased to watch you eat
the kind that brushes your hair behind your ear
like the last puzzle piece
to get a good look at you
their arms open wide
as encompassing as sky
their kiss fits your cheek
their teeth in your hands
grasp at what you can and make a home like that
so you laugh and learn
their fists skipped your generation
no matter what, you're a first
no matter what, you will hurt
compliments matter less now and yet
you are always gorgeous and fed
happy to hear the sound of home
through dinner, whisper, and song

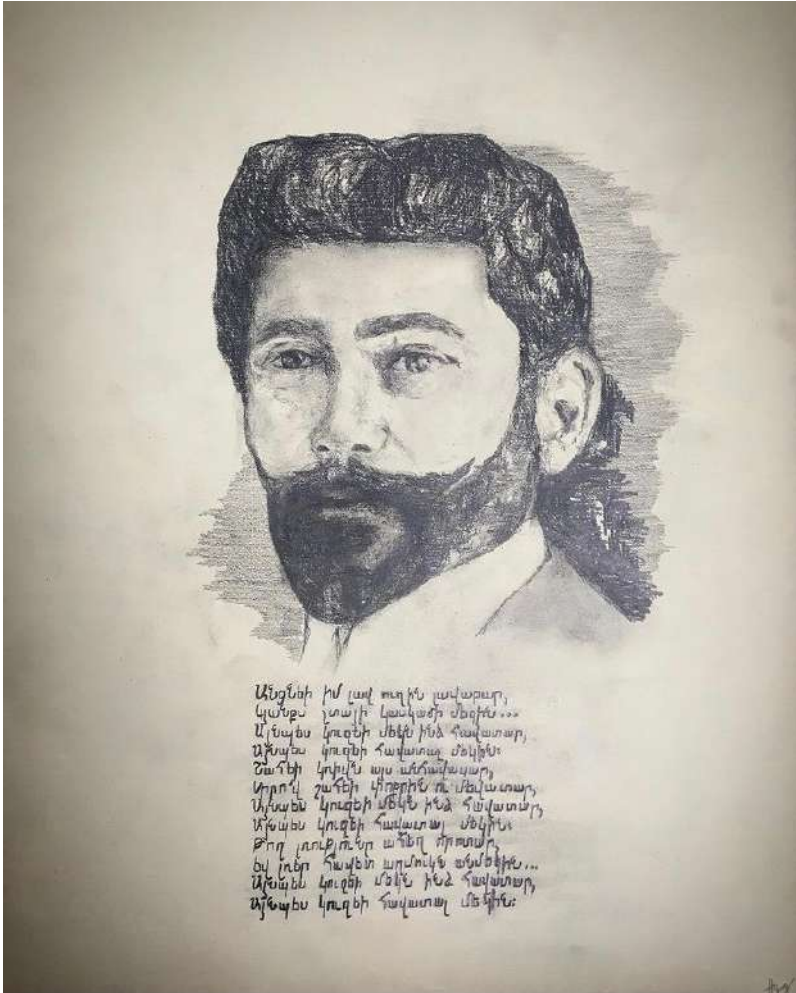
you knew what you always knew
language is not a barrier
you don't pick them up like they are yours
intuition is language
you know what to make and how to make it
you know what to say and how to say it
you exude what they exude
clearly you have the look
It may translate to looking good
It may not be able to be translated
my *tatik* and *papik* died separately
and at the same time
side by side
despite a genocide
It may translate to love
radiating from your entirety
Eternally
we don't have to speak
when we have poetry

First published in *Cherri Harrari*.

Alethia is a Chicago based artist from Glendale, California. She loves to write, dance, sing and cook. She hopes to publish her poetry book someday soon. You can follow her @veganvxxen on Instagram.

PORTRAIT OF SUMPAD DILDILIAN

Hannah Yagmur Gursoy



Oh to walk my way with kindness,
And not betray my life to a cloud of suspicions...
How I wish that someone would believe me,
How I wish that I could believe someone.

To triumph in an unequal battle,
To embrace with love both small and big,
How I wish that someone would believe me,
How I wish that I could believe someone.

Let the silence burst forth with fury,
And the eternal noise die down for good...
How I wish that someone would believe me,
How I wish that I could believe someone.

by Hamo Sahyan (translation by Hannah Yagmur Gursoy)

The portrait of Sumpad Dildilian is part of the series 'Lost Voices of Anatolia' depicting the eradication of the Armenians through the events of the Genocide in 1915. The portrait exploits the historical, political and cultural wrongdoings of the Turkish state of the past, present and foreseeable future. Gursoy's portraits act as a memoriam to those who have been cast away by Turkish nationalism by honouring her Armenian background.

Hannah Yagmur Gursoy is a 23-year-old graduate from SOAS, London. Born to a German mother and Crypto-Armenian father, Hannah delves into the subject matter of identity and the notion of homeland through her artistic expression inspired by her dual heritage. Gursoy's Armenian ancestry derives from the town of Trabzon, the black sea region of Turkey, Western Armenia. For any portrait enquiries please contact hannahyagmurgursoy@gmail.com.

JINGYALOV HATS

Anna Matevosyan

Based on True Events

The plump, grey-haired woman living next door comes to visit me every morning without fail. I have noticed that her legs are swollen and she walks with difficulty. When she moves back and forth in the living room, the china in the cabinet makes rattling sounds. The lady brings me fruit or slices of pies (she says she bakes them herself) wrapped in paper tissue and, after making herself comfortable on the sofa, she says, “Make coffee.” And I don’t like to brew coffee for anyone but myself. One can succeed in cooking the fanciest meals because the recipe is the same for everyone. But not coffee. Because one never really learns how sweet or strong others might like it.

I dislike her and I don’t hide it because she talks so much. And she has annoyingly adopted a phrase that is so out of place here: “Welcome to your new home.” Two days ago, she asked if she could help me unpack. I wanted to ask her, “Unpack what?” but I didn’t. And yesterday she told me that she would love to taste “a real good, hot *jingyalov hats* of Artsakh.” I merely stared at my own feet.

*

I remember, Aunt Jenna, how we used to make *jingyalov hats* in Baku. “Imitations of *jingyalov hats*,” you used to call it, because we never found all the greens to make it as fragrant and flavorful as one would taste it in Artsakh. “A real Artsakh woman has to know how to bake *jingyalov hats*, because it will feed you and your children when there is nothing else to eat,” you told me. You teased me asking how one could prefer life in Baku to *jingyalov hats*, and I frowned every time because your jokes reminded me that I had left Artsakh because my parents had wanted to marry me off at seventeen.

*

I tell this woman that I’m not in the mood for making an imitation of *jingyalov hats* here.

*

Oh, my father, Aunt Jenna, my father had always been a jealous man. Jealous of his wife and over-protective of his daughters. Only a couple of weeks had passed after my seventeenth birthday, and he had already quit that habit of laughing our fellow villagers off when they mentioned how they wished to make me their daughter-in-law one day. Instead, he nodded slowly as if he wanted to show people that they had a point but that he should first think it over.

I had made several attempts in convincing Father to allow me to leave the village and get a profession, but he was adamant in his decision. “In no way will I accept a daughter running after education. You are seventeen? Time to get you married. Period.”

He poured his entire wrath onto my mother daily, just like hot soup all over her head. I sat on the stairs outside our house one summer evening and cried as Father went on shouting at everyone, cursing his own life, and blaming Mother for having raised a bad daughter. “An education she wants! With these looks and character, I won’t be surprised if she ends up ruining her life! Go and teach her that at her age you were already married, woman, married! Aren’t you her mother? Why on Earth does she want to disgrace us all?”

I snapped my *Pride and Prejudice* shut and ran upstairs.

“I talked with Aunt Jenna on the phone yesterday.” I was out of breath and panic was rising in me. “In Baku, she will take care of me while I learn to make clothes. I will send money from my salary once I start working.”

The whole family stood dumbstruck. Then, hell broke loose.

“If you step out of this house and go there, you are no longer my daughter!” Father yelled at the top of his lungs.

“I will still give it a try.”

*

Sometimes the plump, grey-haired woman seems to understand that I am in no mood for talking and leaves me alone. She takes her seat in the room and sighs from time to time. But at the beginning she wasn’t like this! Once she asked me what I was thinking of doing to make money. And it hit me among everything else that I no longer had my two certificates with me. The certificates they had given me for the courses in accounting and sewing years ago in Baku.

*

Baku was big and diverse, and so was life with you, Aunt Jenna, in your cozy apartment on 12 Zavokzalniy, Anashkina 14 where you made me leaf through fashion magazines while I sipped my cacao and ate my *ponchik*. And you told me that walking on heels and wearing skirts was what made a woman out of a woman. We went into different directions to work every day and got back into the same place every evening to watch whatever movie there was on TV and to discuss it later. I used to tell you about my day. You used to tell me about yours. You never called me your daughter but I felt like you would have loved to. And you always scolded me when my mother called and wanted to talk to me and I refused to come to the phone.

And when you passed away, I mourned your death in silence and dignity, my dear auntie, and sat straight and solemn while your neighbors, some of them Armenians and some Azerbaijani, came to your ever-so-sunny apartment and gave their condolences. I was angry with you for having left me alone in that big city, in this huge world, but it is now that I am thankful that you didn't stay longer to see what was coming.

*

In 1988, taking a random taxi in Baku was no longer a reasonable thing to do. You might never reach home because the driver might somehow find out you were Armenian.

There remained fewer and fewer of us in the neighborhood. Somebody told me they had seen the widowed piano teacher hurry to the bus station together with her two daughters and that they had all had headscarves on, to be taken as Azerbaijanis. And years later I learned that Hasan the flower shop owner across the street had saved his Armenian friend's little daughter by hiding her in his house. The militia had burst in and made a huge mess everywhere around, but it hadn't occurred to them to look inside the doghouse.

I went on living and keeping the light burning in your window, Aunt Jenna. Mother called me a few times and pleaded with me to return home. I told her I wouldn't. She offered to send me money, just in case. I proudly answered that I worked and earned my own living. But one day at the market I overheard someone say in Azerbaijani, "Look, she's Armenian and she's not afraid," and when I raised my head to see where it was coming from, my eyes met those of two bearded men in their forties, and a cold chill ran down my spine. My cross had revealed itself and was dangling, loose, on my neck. I had been too busy picking apples and hadn't noticed it. I went home and called my mother. And she sent Nounik's husband for me. I never learned what happened to your home, to our home, Aunt Jenna.

*

“Are you going to sit here all day long? Maybe I can get you a nice hairbrush and you can brush your hair? Do you have a headache? I can give you some good neck and shoulder massage!” The plump grey-haired woman is talking to me gently, and I even want to smile. And then, suddenly, “Where is your husband? Do you have one?”

*

Karo Martirosyan. A hot-headed young man whose most extraordinary feature was that with kids he was a kid and with adults he could turn back to being an adult within a matter of seconds. He was twenty-four. And my fourteen-year-old brother was his friend.

I was twenty when I returned to our village in Artsakh. At home, the topic of my marriage wasn't a top priority anymore. Father was always in a bad mood and expectant, glued to the radio. Mother frequently cried. Devastating news of atrocities against Armenians in Baku came every day. Thousands of people had died in the earthquake in Spitak and Gyumri. And in Yerevan, protests didn't stop.

I was aimlessly walking home one day when I heard a car coming close from behind. A dirty, noisy, beige LADA with multiple chips. And one of its front doors was painted red, as if red was the closest color to beige. It was Karo's car. I put on an ignorant face and avoided looking at him when he passed by. But I was surprised to see my brother was in the car too.

“Come in, sister, I'm taking him home anyway.” Karo was talking to me.

I had no choice. I felt Karo was holding his breath, his hair sweaty, and so was my brother. They were both looking straight at me, expectant. Which of them looked funnier?

I got into the car and we drove in silence. I didn't know where to look and what to do with myself so I started to fidget with the tote bag in which I carried yoghurt. I must talk to Father, I thought. What does this man even teach my teenage brother? They shouldn't hang out together anymore. And who is he to call me sister?

I raised my head and realized we were past our house and heading towards the other end of the village. What the hell? I was still making up my mind about how to protest when Karo braked hard and my brother jumped out of the car. We drove on.

“If you refuse to become my wife, we will both die in this car, now! I can’t live without you. Please, say yes!”

I stared, paralyzed. So, that’s how they do it in Armenia, Aunt Jenna. They call you sister and then they propose to you. And you say yes, and you never come to understand why you did it.

*

Whenever someone commented too much on my beauty or asked about the suitors too frequently, you said they wanted to put a spell on me, Aunt Jenna. That was fun! “Go fix the evil eye clip I’ve given you and never take it off your clothes,” you said sour-faced, “and God will give you the best husband and many children. Go!” But all the evil eye clips were useless. My Karo was gone before I even got to know him well.

I used to hide his gun in the most terrible moments of the war and beg him not to go. I was heavily pregnant and teary-eyed most of the time.

Karo was killed in April of 1992, just one month before our army liberated Shoushi, leaving me and our children behind. Our daughter Melineh was only ten months old.

“My husband was *fedayeen*. He died in the war of the 1990s,” I tell the plump grey-haired woman and place my hand under my cheek, prepared for a hail of questions. But she says nothing. She slowly descends on the chair. I add, “We only lived together for three years. He was the best husband ever.”

Forty days after Karo’s burial they moved all of us out of the village and sent us to Stepanakert. And here I have to make a confession to you, Aunt Jenna. I love you so much, but I hate it when you visit me in my dreams. Because misfortune comes right the next day. Do you come to warn me about it?

Our cars were hit by the Azerbaijani airplanes close to Stepanakert, and as I leaned over Melineh to protect her with my body, a metal shard came right into my back. I touched my back and then I touched my face, and blood mixed with tears.

I lied in a hospital in Yerevan for a few months, and when I returned home, my children had forgotten me, my face, and my body scent.

By the time the war finished in 1994, we were back in our village and I wanted to live alone with my children. No one objected. Not even Karo's parents. I opened my tiny atelier where I designed and sold clothes for women. I regretted not having learned to make men's clothes too, though you had urged me to do so, Auntie. I went to the neighbors, distant relatives, and asked them to let me shake mulberries off their trees to make molasses for coughs and sell them in my atelier to make extra money. I opened three shops in different villages and soon started traveling to Georgia and bringing clothes to sell in Artsakh. And I rarely managed to bake *jingyalov hats*, even though all the greens were at hand in our Artsakh.

I have always wanted you to see the house I put together from scratch, Aunt Jenna. Those movies we watched, with beautiful women sauntering around swimming pools and drinking yellow juices from slim glasses. We never missed those details, but you always said you loved their houses with pools most. My house had no pool but you would still love it because it had the most beautiful flowers in the front yard. Roses, palm trees in pots. There was a large living room upon entering and three bedrooms upstairs. Each with its own bathroom! "It's a hotel, not a house," you would have screamed in amusement.

Years passed.

*

It's the tenth day of me having taken refuge in this town close to Yerevan. Volunteers visit me every other day to see what I need. They have brought some food (though the plump woman tells them that they should really take it to those who need it more because she can share her food with me), an electric heater, and a phone charger.

Today, a girl I hadn't seen before visited me. She was a beautiful child with blue eyes and full lips. She took notes about who I was. She also asked me what I had done previously to make money. The plump woman wasn't there then. Curiosity was smothering her as she learned of the girl later, but it's alright.

*

While anyone else would have simply run away, I decided to stay, Auntie. All of us did. Our hearts must be made of stone, I guess.

On September 27, 2020, I woke up from terrible sounds of bombing and the house shaking. I was hurled from one corner of the room to the other and couldn't get hold of my phone to call my son. Someone's loud weeping outside confirmed that we were at war.

Auntie, I had decided that my son, my first child, my Karo's continuation in this world, would become a military man to take revenge on the Azerbaijanis for his father. It's just that every time a UAV came buzzing above my head, I shuddered thinking that somewhere another UAV might buzz above my son's head.

A week later they turned our village school into a hospital for wounded soldiers. And some days after that, as I was sitting in the bunker with other women, holding a bottle of champagne in my hands and saying that I would open it soon because our army would win, someone called me. My son was wounded.

*

"Some women from Artsakh are in Yerevan and they have started baking and selling *jingyalov hats* right in the city center! There was such a long queue for it as I passed by today. Want to see it?" The plump woman sits closer to show me the photo she has taken with her phone. I say nothing but I take a look.

By the way, she has taken me to her house today and told me to choose anything from her clothes. I stand there, shy, my arms crossed over my chest, and tell her we are different sizes.

"Not that you are a model," she rolls her eyes.

"No, I mean—"

"It's getting cold. Your cardigan and moccasins will be useless soon. Now don't waste my time and choose." She nudges me closer to her collection and left the room.

*

I must confess, Aunt Jenna, my body has changed a lot and yes, I am plumper now. My forehead becomes sweaty and my breasts bounce up and down, and I was breathless as I ran towards the school but I didn't care. All I wanted was to see my son.

And while I was searching for him among others, I witnessed things I would never want you to witness, my auntie. I heard moans of wounded boys of eighteen to twenty who didn't realize where they were. Our soldiers. I saw a boy who sat on a gurney, shaking uncontrollably. Because of an explosion, he had lost the ability to speak and the nurses had given him a pen and paper to write his name. But he was shaking instead, lips shut tight. I saw a father who cried loudly and clung to the doctor's sleeve begging to save his son's life. Later I found out that the doctors had failed to do so. And then I saw my son. But luckily, he wasn't doing that bad.

That bottle of champagne was never opened. On October 7th, the boy living next door came and started banging on everyone's door. "The Azerbaijanis have crossed the river! They will be here in five minutes!"

I only managed to grab my passport. And a jacket. And then my mind went blank.

It's funny how one can make home out of a house in more than thirty years, and lose it in five minutes, Aunt Jenna.

*

A woman on the other side of the phone screen has a face mask on, and is wearing a military uniform, but she must be a news reporter. She holds a microphone in her hand and says something in Azerbaijani. During the years in Baku, I learned that language but I have forgotten a lot of it now. She calls all Armenians donkeys and laughs. Then she walks further into our village and I can spot Irina's pharmacy, destroyed. The Azerbaijanis killed Irina and several other women because they were the only ones who refused to leave the village after it was taken.

*

The woman on the screen moves further and laughs, talking non-stop. They climb up the stairs and open the door of my house. They are inside the living room. I can see my slippers, the polka-dot ones, idling next to the sofa. The table is set. A cup of unfinished coffee, plum marmalade in a glass jar, slices of bread and one spoon. My last breakfast.

My plants look dusty in their pots. But surprisingly they are still alive. The woman climbs upstairs but she never gets to open the door to my bedroom. She stops to examine a few photographs she finds. Then the YouTube video finishes.

I wipe my eyes and put my phone aside. The plump woman looks at me but says nothing.

The girl with blue eyes has called again to ask me how I am doing. She must be waiting for me to decide to move forward.

“I guess I will bake *jingyalov hats* and sell it to people,” I sniff and say to the plump woman. “If you say people working here in town will buy it for their lunch, then I will. But I don’t know where I will find a place to do it.”

The plump woman shifts herself closer and says, “I will give you half of the space in my shop. We will put an oven there. The place is not big but we will figure something out.”

As if it was the most natural thing to do in the world.

Anna Matevosyan is Armenian, born and raised to Armenian parents in Yerevan, Armenia. She completed her master's degree in teaching English at the American University of Armenia in 2009, and worked in both teaching and tour guiding since then. Anna's numerous trips around Armenia, thanks to her guiding job, inspired her to start working on her first short story collection based on true stories of Armenian women. "Jingyalov Hats" is a true story narrated by a woman from Artsakh who lost her home in the war of 2020. It is aimed at raising awareness about the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and cast some light on what happened to thousands of Armenians during the 44 days of war.



art by Juliana Marachlian Nersessian

THE FORTUNE TELLER

Liana Minassian

An old woman
walks into the Starbucks.
“Can I have some money?” she asks,
with her soy milk mustache,
new boots — tags still on.

Customers look away,
going into trances:
computer catatonia;
selective cell phone deafness;
angsty teenage indifference.

Unaffected, she says:
“I’ll tell you your fortune. Read your palm.”
No one seems interested.
But I am.

What if she can read my life line?
Destiny like a coffee stain.

Does she pick
from a handful of pre-selected responses?

“You’re going to have a long life.”
“Someone close to you is going to die.”
“You’re going to come into a lot of money.”

Or will she just stand there staring
at my palm,
shaking her head sadly,
and say:
“Never mind. You don’t want to know.”
Until I promise her
more lattes
and money to feed
her children:
Marc Jacobs, Gianni Versace, and Giorgio Armani.

*

Liana Minassian is a third-generation Armenian (on her father's side) from south Florida, currently living in Los Angeles. She's a graduate of the University of Miami's film and theatre programs and is a writer and photographer with many other varied interests. Her recent publications include MORIA, Muddy River Poetry Review, and Prometheus Dreaming, as well as a self-published poetry and photography zine entitled Solis Obitus. Find her on Instagram @liana_minassian.

TO WHERE WE ARE

for Nonny

David Kherdian

Where am I going to then with my art,
so altered and changed and evolved
from where I was before this—
our final journey of flight and return to America

Transformed by the suffering we have
endured—not to recapture the life before
the tragedy of America went into full gear,
but to a much older place

My own unconscious, now free of the fetters
of this time and place—
to return not only with my mortal remains,
but to the imperishable truth of all that is

Contained in my subconscious—
to resurrect from what is known within that
undying chamber, with its sparks from eternity
taking me to where I am headed—

Led by all that is recoverable from the past,
of which I know and remember so little with
my conscious mind—that it has taken
my art to recover for me and make real—

For all who can cross that bridge with me,
under which flows all the lives being lived,
to empty into that great ocean, never still—
a continuance beyond us, for all alive within it.

RETURNING HOME

Naré Hovakimyan

"Returning Home" is a personal journey to the photographer's native Armenia where she returns as a 28-year-old woman witnessing the memories of her younger self. Her family won a green-card lottery when she was 8 years old and after selling all of their possessions, traveling across the world, and finding themselves in a completely new life, her family began anew. This is the first time the photographer has seen her homeland since through the eyes of that 8-year-old girl, and this photo series is a document of that homecoming. The country has changed over the past two decades with the decline of Soviet influence and the birth of an international tourism industry, but the centuries-old churches show no sign of change since her childhood, and the communist-era architecture still stands holding distantly familiar faces who warmly cook traditional breads as fruits dry on the bed in the room over. This series shows one immigrant's journey returning back "home" as both a native and a tourist in a land that has drastically changed since it was hers.





~

Naré Hovakimyan is an Armenian-born American photographer living in Los Angeles who photographs that which she is familiar with, looking closely at her intimate surroundings, she sees the beauty in light on spaces and observes people with a kind eye for the goodness in others.

THE LETTING GO

Aida Zilelian

A sharp tension crept up Lucine’s shoulders as she drove over the George Washington Bridge, a visceral reaction while crossing the threshold from New Jersey to New York. At least this time, she wasn’t leaving a drunk husband on the couch only to return to him passed out hours later. He was, in most every sense, an asshole—alcoholic or not. Now, and for the last three-and-a-half months, all she left in New Jersey was a mewling cat, whom she had adopted both out of pity for herself and for the cat’s owners, who had passed away. A relative of the deceased gave “Nathan” to a local animal shelter, where Lucine found him.

Almost four months ago, before Nathan, she sat in her cramped car with boxes of her belongings she had been secretly foraging since the early fall and called her sister Margo to ask if she was sure she was doing the right thing.

“Yes,” Margo said emphatically, almost impatiently. “Yes, you’re doing the right thing. This has been seven years coming.”

“It’s Christmas Day!” Lucine protested, as if she hadn’t been the one who had woken up at 3 a.m. and loaded the car, a travel-sized flashlight lodged between her teeth to light her way.

“Even better,” Margo retorted. “You can spend New Year’s Eve with us in New York and celebrate a new start. *Drive.*”

She did and, after staying with a friend for several weeks, found a place of her own. It was the first time she had ever lived by herself. She had married straight out of the house, like her mother had wanted. Although her mother would have preferred the traditional wedding Lucine promised and, more importantly, an Armenian son-in-law instead of an *odar*. An *odar* with whom Lucine had had a two-month fling and extended into a lifelong commitment—impulsivity be damned. Like a piece of stale gum, her mother still chewed over these egregious oversights, as if Lucine could travel back in time and undo the last seven years of her life. To add to her mother’s tireless

complaining, although she and her husband had filed a legal separation, Lucine remained in New Jersey. The rents, she told herself, were too high in Queens to live alone.

“*Finally*,” Azad had said, when Lucine told her she would be able to join the family for dinner. “So we have to wait for the holidays and your birthday to see you now.”

Margo was the oldest and Azad the youngest. As the middle sibling, Lucine felt wedged in, cramped, and invisible. Although, she knew, not many people would agree.

“My hours are tough at work,” Lucine said. “Mary Ann is still looking for a sous chef so I can run the bakery. But for now, I have to do both.”

Despite the occasion and the fact that she and Margo’s birthdays were five days apart, Lucine left her apartment with an unshakeable unease. She’d run back upstairs after she was mid-way down the second flight of steps and gone into her bedroom to re-light the joint from the night before and took two long pulls before heading out again.

It had been a bright, clear day. Although spring, a cold wind hissed through the budding tree branches as the sun set, hints of purple and pink streaking the sky. Lucine remembered this time of year when she had lived at home with her family. Spring was, and had always been, a harbinger that mysteriously gripped Lucine’s mother and sent her into the depths of depression. The suddenness of it all frightened Lucine when she had been a child. When spring came, she began to anticipate the slow unraveling of who she knew as her mother: the half-eaten plates of food she left for days around the house, the robe her mother wore as her daily uniform, the long hours she stayed in bed until the late afternoon, Lucine’s empty lunchbox with only a thermos from the previous day.

As she headed towards the Grand Central Parkway, she was relieved to find that the roads were fairly empty and that she would arrive at the restaurant early. She could sit by herself and have a drink if the restaurant had a bar. Her mother had, very tactfully, chosen a new place for the occasion.

“The reservation is under Takouhi,” Lucine said to the hostess. “Party of five. Actually. . . four.” She pressed her lips together as the unexpected tears smarted her eyes. “I’m guessing they’re not here so I’ll just—”

But she could see Margo, across the room, standing up and waving her over. “Never mind,” she apologized and headed towards the table where her mother and Azad were also sitting.

“I guess we’re all early!” her mother said. She looked lovely, still wearing black, as she had for the last year. She had let her hair turn gray without bothering to dye it anymore, but she had lavishly applied mascara to her already large brown eyes, and her lips shined a ruby red.

“You look great, Mom,” Lucine said, hoping her mother knew she meant it.

She sat in the one empty seat, trying to make herself comfortable. The waist of her jeans, the only ones that still fit her, was now digging into her midsection sharply. There would be a dull imprint of the button and zipper on her torso hours later after she would peel them off. She ran her hand over the top of her head to smooth out the inevitable frizz from the sloppy bun she wore. Margo, who was sitting across from her, smiled, her long brown hair blown-out and appearing longer than Lucine had realized. *She had the baby five months ago. How the fuck does she look this good?*

“So glad you were able to make it!” Azad said.

As Azad opened the menu, Lucine found herself surveying the coiled mass of hair on top of Azad’s head that was her attempt at dreadlocks, the fresh tattoo of flowers encircling her right wrist, and the Tibetan-print halter top that looked freakishly inappropriate in the traditional Italian décor of the restaurant. If *Lucine* had walked in looking like that, her mother wouldn’t be able to contain herself for even five minutes.

“Me too,” Lucine said under her breath and busied herself with opening the menu. She wanted to order a sensible choice for once. She skipped over the pasta section and started reading through the seafood entrées. Her stepfather, Gabriel, would have ordered the mussel appetizer served in a sourdough bread bowl with marinara sauce. Lucine caught herself doing that often when she looked at a menu: guessing what Gabriel would have ordered, what he would have found unappealing and said so.

“The tilapia looks good,” she said. “I think I’ll get that.”

Azad’s face curdled with disgust. “I wouldn’t do that,” she said flatly. “Apparently, it’s the dirtiest fish there is. My friend was telling me about an article she read—”

“My friend is a fisherman,” Lucine retorted. She repositioned herself in her seat, aware of the sudden indignation in her voice. “He would know. He said tilapia is one of the most nutritious fish—”

Ignoring her, Azad took her phone out of her purse and started typing. Margo and her mother had been talking about sharing a seafood platter. They seemed, in that moment, like a pair of actors in the background of a movie or play, unimportant but necessary for the scene.

“What are you doing?” Lucine asked.

It took half a minute for Azad to respond, growing more absorbed in scrolling through her cell phone. “The article. I want to show it to you.”

“I don’t need to see an article!” Lucine said loudly. “Why can’t I just order a fucking entrée without you having to research it?”

Azad placed her phone down on the table. “Fine.”

“What’s going on?” Margo asked, as if she didn’t know. As if they were a pair of children that needed supervising.

Their mother remained quiet and took a sip of wine, glanced up at the ceiling as if hoping it would pass.

“I want to order tilapia,” Lucine said to Margo and then turned to Azad. “Why do you always have to be right? Why can’t I just order something?”

Azad widened her eyes, innocent-seeming. “I was just saying it’s a dirty fish and thought you’d want to see the article.”

“My friend Rob is a fisherman,” Lucine said. “He would know.”

“Order the tilapia,” Margo said brightly. “That’s what you want. I love tilapia.” Always trying to keep things balanced, always trying to make it better. Whether she had been given this role or assumed it unconsciously, these moments of tension gave Margo her cue.

The waiter appeared to take their orders, and their attention shifted as he described the specials for the evening. Lucine noticed Margo exhaling under her breath as she listened patiently and took a long sip from her glass of red wine.

Gabriel had died of esophageal cancer. Their mother dragged him to a doctor after his persistent cough continued for two months into early November. He died in January, two weeks before Margo gave birth to Ruby. Lucine, already having left her husband, spent many evenings lying in the

bed of her new apartment, in her new and empty undefined world, contemplating how she had abandoned one life and could barely face a new one. Especially without Gabriel. Her mother had married him when Lucine was a young child. Lucine's love for him had been unconditional, a love she had never experienced for another person. As she sat with her sisters and her mother in the Italian restaurant, out together for the first time since his passing, she wondered if they were all guilty of attempting to play out a façade of harmony. It seemed almost heartless to eat. And Lucine sensed that the mention of him would shatter the possibility of a happy evening.

The waiter appeared with a small entourage of men and began serving the entrées and drinks. Lucine could smell the brininess of the capers from her plate as it was placed in front of her. As she lifted the first forkful to her mouth, she caught Azad wrinkling her nose at the direction of her fish. *I fucking saw that*. But Lucine let it go. She had a long and inexplicable history of “shitting on special occasions,” as Margo had pointed out to her once during one of their rare arguments.

“How is everyone’s meal?” her mother asked.

“Fine.”

“Great.”

“Amazing.”

Their mother nodded, pleased. She was notoriously finicky about restaurants. The girls would all glare at her when she lifted a water glass up to the light or ran her fingers over the utensils to examine their cleanliness. She did the same with Lucine and Margo, daughters from her first marriage. Her eyes measured their appearance with blatant scrutiny, unaware and unconcerned about the self-consciousness it caused. Azad, her only daughter with Gabriel, was given a pass.

“Thanks, Mom,” Margo said, lifting her glass. “I meant to do this before we started eating. Thanks for such a nice birthday dinner.”

They all clinked glasses, a perfunctory gesture, and went back to eating in silence. The men at the bar laughed heartily, deep cigarette-induced phlegmy laughs, and when Lucine saw their open shirt collars and their hands gripping the scotch glasses, revealing gold pinky rings, she felt as if she was in a classic mafia movie. The women also laughed; high-pitched bawdy exaggerated cackles rose from every table, women clad in shoulder-

pad dresses and mouths coated with frosted lipstick. Lucine smiled to herself.

“How did we celebrate last year?” Margo asked.

“Last year . . .” Lucine tried to remember. Nothing. Her mother had started driving Gabriel to the Long Island Jewish Medical Center for chemotherapy.

“I meant the year before,” Margo caught herself. “What did we do the year before?”

Azad orchestrated an awkward feat in eating her dinner with her left hand and texting on her phone with her right. It was unnerving to watch.

“Adrian?” her mother asked.

“Uh-huh,” Azad answered without looking up. “We’re going to meet up later. Just trying to figure out . . . Brooklyn or the city.”

Lucine felt her knees shaking, as if her body had to communicate to her the tide of anger sweeping over her. “I thought we were going back to Margo’s for a nightcap,” she said. Azad let out a small, frustrated huff. “I came all the way from New Jersey—”

“And I had plans already, which I changed because you said your boss gave you the night off and you could make it,” Azad countered. “I’m not racing out of here or anything. Just meeting Adrian later to hang out.”

Say something to her, Lucine thought, glaring at her mother, the words unable to leave her. Tell her this is not okay. You would never have allowed this if it had been Margo or me.

“Thank you for changing your plans around,” her mother said. “I didn’t realize you did that.”

“Are you fucking kidding?” Lucine didn’t know to whom she was directing the question.

Her mother looked up at the ceiling again, smiling wanly, or so it seemed, and Lucine could feel a rage pulsing at her temples.

“Let’s go outside,” Margo said, standing up. “Maybe I’ll steal a few drags off your cigarette.”

She left the table, and Lucine felt she had no choice but to follow.

Once outside, the dam within her broke. “What the hell was *that?*” Lucine began. “Is she kidding? Like changing plans around is such a big sacrifice!”

“Let it go,” Margo said, taking the cigarette from her. She took a drag and exhaled disgustedly. “I hate these things. Why do I bother?”

“I have to sit there and eat shit with a smile,” Lucine continued.

“You have to stop looking at everything that way. You’re not eating shit. Mom’s taking us out for our birthday. It’s nice. It must be hard for her,” Margo said.

“It’s hard for all of us,” Lucine retorted, aware that she was deliberately missing the point.

“Please,” Margo said. “This is—”

“I *know*. A special occasion.” Lucine flicked her cigarette into the street.

When they returned to their table, the waiters had cleared their plates and left dessert menus. Azad and their mother seemed absorbed in conversation, and as Lucine and Margo took their seats, they pulled away from each other. Lucine was only able to catch the pointed look her mother gave Azad. She wondered if it was in her favor.

“You know what? I’m going to run to the bathroom really quick,” Lucine said.

She walked into the bathroom and stood in front of the sink, adjusting the water so she could warm her hands, which had felt clammy all evening. When she looked at herself in the mirror, she stared into her own eyes. She stood still and continued as if waiting to realize something. And then a memory: visiting Gabriel in the hospital when he had been admitted the first time.

He had been sitting up in the hospital bed, his legs swung over as if he was about to get up. That’s when she walked in.

“Lucine!” His eyes brightened. They seemed to glow against his pale pallor and graying beard.

“Gabe!” She hugged him, but not as heartily, as if the strength of her embrace would drain whatever life he had left in him. “Were you getting up for something?”

He lifted the cold-water pitcher and shook it. “Empty,” he said.

“I’ll get it.” Lucine walked into the bathroom and started running the water. She looked at her reflection, her watering eyes. “Pull it together,” she had whispered to her frightened reflection. “Pull your shit together.”

Upon her return, she found him, back in bed and sitting up. “So tell me, how’re things? How’s work? How’s—”

“Working a lot,” she said. She gave him a brief and intense summary of her hours at work, hours she had taken on because her husband had lost his temper at his job and walked out.

Gabriel shook his head. “I guess you must like it,” he said.

She shrugged. “It’s always there—you know. You used to say the same thing about work.”

He nodded sagely. “Always there. The more work I translated the more there was to translate.”

That was the last time she could bring herself to visit him there. Selfishly, she was thankful he had returned home shortly after. Visiting there was no less painful. Watching her mother spiral deeper into the never-ending tunnel of finding a cure: natural pills promising a prolonged life for cancer patients, recipe books for making smoothies with healing effects, a list of foods to eat and avoid for people suffering from esophageal cancer, overseas phone conferences with “renowned” cancer specialists. Her mother, like a tireless moth fluttering about spastically, without direction.

And then one morning, Margo called to tell her he had died. Lucine managed to get herself into the car, lighting one cigarette after another, finally breaking into tears as she paid the toll at the George Washington Bridge, and pulling into a spot in front of her mother’s building less than half an hour later.

“Don’t worry,” her mother began, “I’m not embarrassing you with a birthday song. Order whatever dessert you like.”

Margo read through the list. “Crème brûlée, panna cotta, tiramisu, zabaglione, ricotta cheesecake. So rich and delicious. Maybe I’ll pick one thing and we can all share it.”

Azad sat quietly with the dessert menu turned over, her face vacant, unoccupied with her cell phone for once. Lucine decided not to order dessert, but read through the items again. A strange quietness had settled at the table, and the boisterousness of the restaurant engulfed them. Another cackle rose from across the room.

“Ricotta cheesecake. Gabriel would have ordered that,” Lucine said

out loud. She drew in a sharp breath, wondered for a moment if she had just thought it. But then she saw her mother look away and cover her mouth with her hand. Margo leaned back in her chair and threw her head back to finish the last of the wine in her glass and all but slammed it back on the table. Azad stared at Lucine—a dumb, unwavering stare—and said nothing.

“I’m sorry,” Lucine began.

Azad stood up and pushed her chair with a shudder and walked out. Margo followed her. From the back of the room Lucine saw a waiter holding a plate in one hand, and cupping the flames of two flickering candles with the other. Two other waiters stood behind him and began walking towards the table.

“I thought you said no birthday song,” Lucine said to her mother, who was now wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.

“I was stalling,” her mother said, barely managing the words.

Lucine stood up from her seat and signaled the waiters to stop before they fully reached the table. “No,” she said. “Let’s skip the cake. Our plans have changed.”

Disoriented, a waiter blew out the candles, and they all walked away, disappearing behind the swinging doors of the kitchen.

“I’m sorry,” Lucine said. “I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“I know. Please just go outside. I’ll meet you out there in a few minutes,” said her mother. Lucine looked at her mother for a moment, her lipstick faded, her eyes shining with tears, revealing the permanent grief Lucine was never there to see. Since Gabriel’s death she had not visited the apartment, the very place her mother and Gabriel had lived when they first married. It had been all five of them once, and now there was only her mother.

Lucine took her coat without bothering to put it on. Both Margo and Azad were outside smoking cigarettes in silence. Lucine pulled one out from her pack and lit it. She imagined her mother sitting alone at the table and reading over the expensive bill, taking out her wallet and stacking the bills—she didn’t like using credit cards—and then recounting the total. Without warning, Lucine felt the tears spilling from her eyes. Hot, fresh tears that used to surprise her as a child, when she had been reprimanded too harshly.

Lucine wanted to tell them it wasn't her fault. Not this time. She hadn't lost her temper; she hadn't exploded and disappeared, only to return without apology or remorse or anything incriminating. And there wasn't Gabriel anymore to take hold of her and remind her of her foolish impetuosity. "You keep spilling over," he used to say. "You have to let things go. Stop trying to contain it all. You'll always seem like the bad guy at the end."

"But I wasn't trying to contain anything." Margo and Azad turned around. They hadn't seen Lucine standing behind them. And again, Lucine didn't realize she had said it out loud. "Really," she continued, without trying to stop crying. "I wasn't trying to contain anything. It wasn't my fault."

What a mess she must have looked, her hair in a strangled knot, the fat of her midsection bulging from underneath her T-shirt, her face pink and swollen from violent blubbering. She didn't care what had made them march over together, pity or an impulse to protect her from making a scene that had already been made, but Lucine felt two pairs of arms surround her as she buried her face in the crook of her sisters' necks and sobbed mightily. She could feel the grief surging through her limbs, her heart literally aching. There was so much she wanted to say, but her throat was clogged and what did it matter? She imagined a bird's-eye view of the three of them at that very moment and then thought of her mother. Lucine hoped she was watching them through the window from the warmth of her table. Or maybe she was looking up again, knowing they were all being watched over, and smiling.

~

Aida Zilelian is a first-generation American-Armenian writer and teacher from Queens, NY. Her fiction explores the depths of love and family relationships, culture and the connections between characters that transcend time and circumstance. Her first novel (unpublished) The Hollowing Moon, was one of the top three finalists of the Anderbo Novel Contest. The sequel The Legacy of Lost Things was published in 2015 (Bleeding Heart Publications) and was the recipient of the 2014 Tololyan Literary Award. Aida has been featured on NPR, The Huffington Post, Kirkus Reviews, Poets & Writers, the New York Times, and various reading series throughout Queens and Manhattan. Her work has appeared in The MacGuffin, Red Hen Press (anthology of first-generation immigrants), and others. Her short story collection These Hills Were Meant for You was shortlisted for the 2018 Katherine Anne Porter Award.

www.aidazilelian.com

A GLIMPSE INTO THE CREATIVE LIVES OF JULIE AND KRISTINA ASRIYAN

By Rafaella Safarian & Nour-Ani Sisserian

Julie and Kristina do it all: write, act, direct, produce, sing, dance. Julie has appeared in episodes of *The Blacklist*, *Blue Bloods*, and national commercials for Kohl's. Her directorial repertoire includes her 60-second micro-film *HOME* (starring her sister Kris), which was named the top finalist in Terry George's (director of *The Promise*) Creative Armenia Human Rights Film Challenge. Her latest short film *Amadi Comes Home* will be released soon.



Julie: *When it comes to catching the acting bug, I think it's always been there and became a natural progression of other artistic studies and endeavors. I was a performer/dancer as a kid and studied music as well. The stage always called to me. I also always had a fascination with the human experience, the "why do people do what they do? Why do people lead the lives they lead" I studied psychology and philosophy in college and took my first screenwriting class as well. I also just always loved movies and began to understand moviemaking as an art and not just as a form of entertainment. But perhaps there was a part of me that thought it was a somewhat otherworldly kind of career. At some point I realized film and theater allowed me to explore humanity and artistry, and I dove right in. I was accepted into a conservatory actor training program in New York and hit the ground running thereafter.*

Kristina, who also goes by the stage name Kris Alberts as an homage to her father, is a singer/songwriter, actress, and director herself, having released her EP “Not Gonna Lie” in 2015 (produced by her sister Julie) along with several music videos. Her acting career has led her to the big screen as well as the stage. She’s appeared in the blockbuster movie *Hustlers*, and stage productions of *Legally Blonde* and *AIDA*.

Kris: *I don’t actually remember a time where I didn’t have “the bug.” I may have been born with it. Performing arts and the world of that magic was somewhat all I ever knew. Performing arts was my “extra-curricular,” it was my “playtime” and then became my career. We were very lucky to have very supportive parents who once they saw we were serious about this never tried to steer us away but rather “If you’re going to do this...DO IT!” I’d like to think we are “doing” our best*

They credit their parents for their creative upbringing:

Julie: *It’s in our blood really. We were raised in a very artistic and creative home. Our father, Albert Asriyan, was a composer, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist. We heard music in the house from sunup to sundown. But more than that, we saw his creative process and devotion and joy for his work every day — practicing daily, writing daily, creating new work daily. Kris and I used to joke that if we see dad playing music with his eyes closed, he’s like somewhere on another planet. We loved seeing it. And I think our love for storytelling in whatever medium came from our mom. Her artistry and creativity just flows out of her. She too is a performer, musician and songwriter, was a child dancer, but she is also an author, a painter, a seamstress. Growing up with a mom like ours meant there was a lot of room for magic.*

Kris: *It didn’t just stop at our parents. It was our relatives, many of whom are also musicians, and their friends. Our family parties were usually our parents, aunts and uncles and their friends sitting around and singing in harmony around a piano while me, Julie, and our cousins are in a nearby room creating some sort of “show” to present to them.*

Being an Armenian creative can be difficult, because not all Armenian families support their children’s decision to pursue art. Julie and Kris gave their advice for Armenians who want to pursue a career in the arts.

Julie: *We are very lucky to have Armenian parents who nurtured and supported our love and devotion to this work, and I know for a fact how difficult it is to build a career in this business without support. I would say the best advice I can give is to “find your tribe.” If it’s not your parents or sibling who is in it and along for the ride, then find your people, find and connect with the people who speak your heart’s language and understand this world— and collaborate, create, create, create.*

Kris: *We were very blessed to have parents who understood and nurtured this passion and of course to have each other. It is a very difficult career. It's just plain hard. You need thick skin and you need to be prepared for a world of rejection in between the good moments, unless you're one of those "lucky" ones. Absolutely find your artistic community and create with them. But truly, (and I said this to a high school senior drama class I was invited to speak to) If you can see yourself working in any other industry, maybe do that. But I don't say that to be negative, if you're in this...live in it and love it!! And know that what you're fighting and working so hard for will come!*

Although they have excelled in their individual careers, Julie and Kris just as successfully make magic together.

Julie: *We are able both collaborate and have our own careers we're building and also help one another along the way. But I'd say it's not a separate factor of our sibling relationship, creating and working together is very much a part of our sibling dynamic— it's hard to separate the two.*

Kris: *It started out as "playtime" to becoming our careers, and doing that together happened very organically. Even our independent careers run on the heels of supporting each other. We are running lines together, we are filming auditions for each other, we are borrowing each other's clothes (well that also happens in everyday life too). It isn't hard to balance at all because I think our relationship as sisters lives in this world. In fact, I think this "artist" world would be much harder to balance with regular life if we didn't have each other. What we have is strong and unlike any other sibling relationship I've ever seen. If one day all of this went away, our bond would never.*

Julie: *There are seven years between us and I'm older, so at first it was me coming up with elaborate ideas. For instance, we have a VHS tape of me staging a fully costumed "A whole new world" dance number in our living room. I was Aladdin and four-year-old Kris and our cousin Katy were the two Jasmynes. The costumes, by the way, were hand made by our mom. I mean, that was just our lives, always.*



In HyeBred Magazine's Crave issue



Kris on HyeBred Magazine's Forget-Me-Not issue cover

Not only is their sisterly bond strong, their creative bond, is too.

Julie: *We are similar in many ways certainly. We are steadfast and committed to this work, to this life, despite the many challenges that arise in this business. Our devotion and drive is unwavering. An idea, a muse hits us, and we run with it and see it through. We both experience the joy of creating and building an idea into fruition, especially together, so acutely. I think the ways that we differ is in the ways that I think we balance and complement each other. I love that Kris is an optimist and doesn't allow her brain to overbalance her heart. There's a sort of purity and honesty in her and it shows in her songwriting and her acting. I admire her so much for that. I think I can maybe be a pragmatist more often and I can get cerebral and overanalyze, but that helps with specificity and execution. I'd say we're a good balance.*

Kris: *There aren't many other people that can understand what this whole business and the creative process feels like for me as closely as I'm sure Julie does. We are similar in all those ways she mentioned, we love this magic world and put everything into it. And we are absolutely a good balance. She'll always pick up on something I wouldn't think of which will usually bring the work to a whole other level. I think with me who can sometimes enjoy the beauty of the "simple," sometimes the "let's just leave it" conversations make for the best options too. It really depends on what the piece is as well, sometimes we are the other way around. I think each time one person's ideas pick up where the other's left off. Other times I also just agree with whatever she says cause she's literally a genius!*

Where do they get their ideas from?

Julie: *Everywhere, really. There are endless sources of inspiration and I do think there's an element of magic when the inspiration births an idea. When the muse comes to you. It can be so clear sometimes; you can see it play out in your mind start to finish. For instance, also during Covid lockdown, I shot a tiny black and white film with my daughter called "Fly." I was inspired by my child's sense of wonder despite the circumstance of being cooped up indoors and by seeing a literal little black fly trying to find its way out of the closed window.*

Kris: *Life. Just everyday life. My feelings. I'll be having a conversation with a friend and say something that I think would make a cool song lyric. Other art is also inspiring. I'll play some chord progressions and envision the music video cuts to each one. I think that's the cool thing about being an artist. Our brains kind of function differently. Everything is inspiring.*

And which Armenian and/or non-Armenian people and pieces inspire Julie and Kris?

Kris: *This one is tough. I am inspired by so many artists. My parents will always be my first inspiration. I so wish I had the opportunity to create music as an adult with my dad. I have no doubt we would create my first Armenian-American crossover pop hit. I really enjoy Armenian pop music. Can't help but to dance. We had the pleasure of dancing on stage for Tata Simonyan when he was performing in New York several years ago. In the film/tv world I've been drawn to the comedians that can play drama just as well. Jim Carrey, Robin Williams. Sandra Bullock has always been a fave. Idina Menzel on stage. There is so much talent out there.*

Julie: *Oh wow, there are so many film directors and artists that have inspired me. For instance, Sergei Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates* and Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind*, both masterpieces I adore, live in the same inspired space in my head —poetic symbolism in visual storytelling? Just perfection. But also like the Soviet movie-musicals "D'Artagnan and Three Musketeers" there's so much nostalgic joy for these movies for me, they live in my head rent-free. I love movie-musicals —theater and film collide, best of both worlds — I'm happy to see them make a comeback in Hollywood. I love what Lin-Manuel Miranda is doing.*

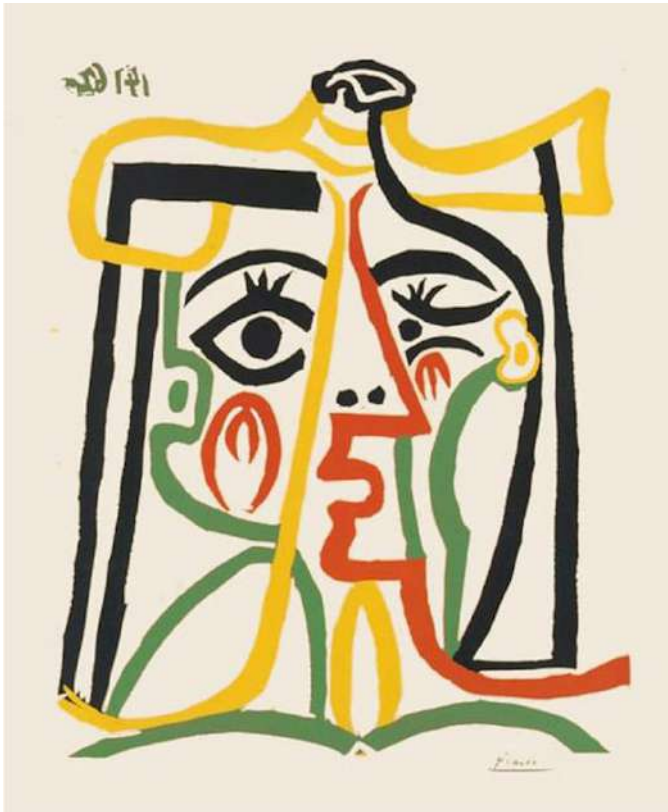
Julie and Kris are each other's constant when it comes to pursuing their creative passions. We asked the Asriyan sisters about what their collaboration process looks like.

Julie: *Oftentimes either I or Kris will come to each other with an idea for a project. And more often than not, we will "yes, and..." . It's hard to explain but we sort of built an organic way of collaborating and nothing either one of us brings to the table is ever a crazy idea. It's just "cool, so how do we do this". I think we just love collaborating so much that each opportunity is seen as a chance to play if you will.*

Kris: *It is absolutely the most organic collaboration process. She is the easiest and best partner to have. I also trust her like I trust no one else, with anything really. I often joke that if she told me she truly believed she could perform heart surgery on me, I'd let her. That level of trust when you're creating art is so important. Even if there is an idea that I'm skeptical about I will always see it through because I know more times than not, it will end up great. We actually had that happen on a recent music video of mine during the hair & makeup. We weren't done and I was worried it wasn't coming out how I had hoped. "It's not done yet, trust the process!" she said to me. It of course ended up being one of my favorite looks. As for the Picasso recreation I knew from the beginning it would end up cool. Once Julie has an idea...it will be. So my thought process there was literally just "ok lets play." We were and are in fact very, very lucky to be living together during such a crazy time, and during the not crazy times as well.*

During quarantine, while most of us were struggling to complete jigsaw puzzles and watching (or making) TikTok videos, the Asriyan sisters never stopped creating, like their "Portrait of Sisters in Quarantine."

Julie: *We created it in May 2020, during NY's Covid lockdown. We are lucky to live together, and creating has always been our heart's medicine. There was a trend going on on social media where people would recreate classic paintings while cooped up indoors—American Gothic, Girl with The Pearl Earring, The Birth Of Venus, and the like. I thought, wouldn't it be fun to try to recreate something more surreal? During a most surreal time?*



Pablo Picasso
Portrait of Jacqueline in a Straw Hat
Materials: Color linocut
January, 1962 Mougins, France



Julie & Kristina Asriyan
Portrait of Sisters in Quarantine
Materials: hanger, yellow electrical tape, my daughter's paint and my sister's patience
May, 2020 New York, USA

I went through my books for inspiration and found this painting and thought “that's the one.” I showed it to Kris and said I have this idea and her reaction was to laugh and say “Ok, how?!” I used whatever I had in the house to pull this together. Her patience, which I wrote about rather jokingly, came from having to restage and reposition her and I about a million times to get the framing and body positions just right. But we truly laughed through it all. And so, Portrait of Jaqueline in a Straw Hat became Portrait of Sisters in Quarantine.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected just about every industry. While it's been an adjustment for us all, we asked Julie and Kris to talk about their experience working in the arts during the most unprecedented time.

Kris: *Covid hit the arts world hard. Our whole industry is about working with a group of people closely together. Between cast, film, or stage crew, production and everyone in between. It was impossible to work. Theaters went dark and productions shut down. And it was heartbreaking. Luckily, after some time off they were able to implement safety protocols. It is very different. But I am so thankful we were able to get back to work.*

Julie: *Right, 2020 was difficult and shaky. There really wasn't any work at all. I think our whole industry was trying to figure out how to make this art world work with Covid present. We all were really scared about when and how we'd be able to work again. But once those safety protocols and mandates were implemented, we collectively made choices to keep one another as safe as possible while still being able to do the work we love. I've worked on many sets since and have been very relieved and honestly proud of all the efforts made by productions to maintain best safety measures while working in a pandemic. But I also want to say that while work wasn't available, this didn't mean we stopped being creatives/artists. Both Kris and I, like many other artists, found ways to stay creative, even in Covid isolation.*

The pandemic and mental-health struggles came hand-in-hand. But even outside of the pandemic, working in the arts is not an easy feat. So how do these inspiring, ambitious sisters deal with time periods where they have less working opportunities?

Kris: *Any artist without their next "gig" lined up is always going to be in some sort of uneasy state. This is why "survival jobs" are a thing in our world. But of course, an artist always wants to be creating. This career can truly take a toll on your mental health. It's important to take care of yourself and have a good support system. Luckily with Julie and I even if there are less working opportunities, we are still able to create on our own. Whether it be a small film idea we come up with. A fun skit. Or writing music or scripts. Making music videos. We don't exactly always have to wait for the work to come to us.*

Julie: *Yeah, totally. I think any person in any industry is gonna have times of unease if there isn't some sort of work continuum. This business can be fickle and work stability is rarely part of the equation. We kind of accepted this early on. This is not to say it doesn't affect us, it absolutely does. But like Kris said, we like to stay focused on creating, connecting with other creatives, keeping our artist muscles flexing.*

Getting acting jobs in TV and film can be a real challenge sometimes, especially for minorities. We asked them about their experience as Armenian actors and whether they believe the industry has changed over the years in casting more people with an ethnic background.

Julie: *I do believe that the TV and Film landscape is changing for the better for minorities as a whole. But this is an especially tricky subject for Armenians. Because as it is now, there are just not that many Armenian stories being told and genuine complex and nuanced Armenian characters being portrayed in Hollywood. I truthfully keep a log of Armenian characters whenever I see them pop up in mainstream TV/Film (not solely created by Armenian filmmakers), oftentimes they can be caricatures. In years I've worked as an actor in theater and tv, I can count on one hand the number of times I've gone out for or was excited to see specifically an Armenian character. There's just not a lot of representation. I aim to change and challenge this. Representation matters.*

Kris: *It has absolutely changed and should continue to do so. As an Armenian actor we are considered "ethnically ambiguous" in the casting world which has more recently become considered something they look for in the room. For some time the goal was to "not look so ethnic" which is hard when...you are. I'm glad things are changing but as Julie mentioned, there is a long way to go.*

The Asriyan family fled from Azerbaijan to New York, which has since been home. Years later, the sisters were featured in a commercial for the 9/11 Memorial & Museum titled "Our City. Our Story." They share how their story as refugees impacts their work.

Julie: *As an Armenian refugee kid from Soviet Azerbaijan and a descendant of Ottoman genocide survivors and Artsakhtsis and a proud naturalized American New Yorker who also spent some years growing up in Moscow, I think perhaps I'll be reconciling, unpacking, and reimagining the concept of "home" for the rest of my days. Home is so tangled with identity. And there's a lot to unpack when it comes to my identity markers. But I do feel very much at home in New York, more than anywhere else. New York was our first home upon immigration and it is where I did a lot of growing up and where I am raising a family, a career, a future. New York is my home. I explore some of this in my personal work —my micro-short film "Home," an allegorical visual poem of our experience with displacement, stars Kris with music scored by our mom. And of course, the series I mentioned earlier. I think being a refugee gave me an acute sense of truth and that is a gift in storytelling.*

Kris: *We came to the US when I was two. I don't have real memories of coming to America, but my family's story and being a refugee kid is a huge part of who I am. Knowing my family history and what we went through to get here has me looking at life and the state of the world through a completely different lens. Also, the way I was raised—in an Armenian/American house with Soviet parents. It all affected who I am today and my heart. My musical style is inspired by what I heard growing up. Music was our family's bread and butter. When we had no language and no real money to start a life in the US with—there was music and bringing it to the community as a means of survival. My history will always play a part in my connection to music. It runs very deep.*

The Asriyan sisters are far from slowing down. They have many projects lined up. They told us about a couple:

Julie: *Just a few days ago Kris and I shot the music video for her new song "For A moment," I'm editing that now and it should be released quite soon. I'm also writing a children's book inspired by ancient Armenian culture, writing a musical and working on a few other screenplays. My film "Amadi Comes Home" is slated for release soon as well.*

Kris: *Working on releasing my newest single and music video called "For A Moment." Already itching to jump back into the studio to record the next one. I have a lot of music written. I am also waiting on final details for a fun short theater tour I may be a part of. Excited to share more soon!*

But which project is dearest to their hearts?

Julie: *I think everything I've created or worked on is dear to me in some way, but perhaps the series screenplay I've written inspired by the peculiarities, intricacies, heartbreak, comedy, and beauty of our lives as Armenian Refugee kids growing up American millennials is most dear to me. I hope to, no plan to, have it come to be a series one day soon.*

Kris: *It's hard to choose one thing. My debut EP will always hold a special place in my heart. It was my first release as an independent recording artist. It was the first time people heard my songwriting. Any time I release music really will feel that way...it literally is my heart set to music. My life's soundtrack if you will.*

What's Kris's favorite part about writing music?

Kris: *It is a release like I've never felt before. I write — heart on my sleeve. It's not particularly metaphorical. It is literally my heart and my feelings set to fit the structure of a song. It is very fun to find the rhymes, to find the one liners that hit, to find the vague little bit of information that is telling about who or what this can be about without actually spilling everything. To find the chord change that tugs at the heart strings just right. You want people to feel what you feel and to then relate in their own ways. I once managed to put 'TJ Maxx' in a line of a song. The song was never finished but I got a kick out of that one line. Writing songs is one of my favorite things in the world to do.*

Where can you find out more?

Julie:

Website: <https://julieasriyan.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JulieAsriyan/>

Instagram: @Julieasriyan

Kris:

Website: <http://kristinaasriyan.com/>

Facebook: and <https://www.facebook.com/KrisAlbertsOfficial/>

Instagram: @KrisAlberts

pt. 1

I feel the same as slag
suspended by hollow breath,
heavier than foreign hands that
suffocate the earth, strangling
my memory of the mountain.

THE WORLD IS A MILL

Poetry by John

Illustration by Zepure @flatdimensions

impressions on the grave,
emptiness within emptiness,
entombed in this oppressive
massif on my shoulders—

a bouquet of tension like
froth edging off of a glare,
I toil and labor long into twilight
while my clay mask cracks in two.

black and blood and gravel
ground into living dust against
ancient bruises, battered palms
holding the earth still to cradle
my mountain of memories.

pt. 2

I am afflicted with amnesia,
beholden to a long shadow
cast over the face of time—

my face.

where I once sucked the marrow,
now the riverbanks run dry,
fast fading arteries upon the earth—

my flesh.

hark, the angel's sad laughter:
sounds from a carillon of recollections
engaged in futile contest—

my folly.

TURKEYS ON MOOSE HILL

Nancy Agabian

Pecking my parents' front yard
full of fall leaves,
hunched round,
viridian and brown,
floating across the window frame,
a rafter.

As a child I played in the woods
nearby and never did I see a turkey
among the curbs and shutters.
Something beyond
a colony of lawns
ripe with grubs
calls the oven birds back.

The gobblers peck their way
to the bottom of Moose Hill.
As they cross the street,
cars slow down until
one blasts a honk
like they did at my teen

ass in tight jeans. Plump
as dirigibles, they're wonted;
naturally neighbors joke online
about consuming the birds
in thanks.

I know, this land is their home, not ours.
So who decided to name it Moose Hill?
Never did I see a bull, cow, or calf roaming
the woods. Did a nearsighted human
mistake a turkey for a moose?
Are they immigrants, or were they brought here
against their will, their name a faraway
land where Armenians were killed?
Where our patronym marked us with
a lowly status, Turkish dogs given
our fathers' forenames like Hagop.

The plural of moose is moose,
the word Algonquin,
though we are on land of
the Wampanoag.

This street was a dirt road
when my parents built a house,
flattening sacred burial mounds.
Never did I see an animal
greater than a squirrel
as I ran wild. I assumed the big game
departed with the Indians.
I didn't see who
remained on Turtle Island
after we parched their paradise.

Thanksgiving 2014: I post photos
of the turkey's pilgrimage
on my Facebook page below
Michael Brown's parents crying in rage.
Not much has changed.
When the moose return, will
we finally grieve our crimes with the
plaintive sound of their name?

I'M AN ANCIENT PEOPLE!

Nancy Agabian

My features evolved
so I can absorb
the world.

My eyes black pupils
seeing dim light.

My nose a flower, honey
extracted from song.

My mouth a smile, a tear
in the lying carpet of oligarchs.

I'm an ancient people!
and a sage
celebration and terror
treading my dna.

I'm an ancient people!
not to be confused with ancient grains,
like spelt or kamut, you cannot
brand or stretch my fiber,
traveling like a spore.

I'm an ancient people!
I laugh at night
and cry with babies,
nanny to the meek and forsaken.

I'm an ancient people!

My sex a cypher,
pronouns long nought.

My soul communal
slipping into your cracks.

My future uncertain,
sensitive to heaven
and hell, skittering a spot
on the ocean to surface

to survive

with God's sperm in my belly,
stars exploding
synapses of race,
metaphors made of mud
then shattered to shards, ashes
to dust.

An ancient people
still bleeds
into one.

art by Juliana Marachlian Nersessian



HAILING

Nancy Agabian

I took a yellow cab tonight. Call me old fashioned but it's better than Uber. I love the plexiglass window between the front and back, cloudy as placenta, the seat very low and the window too high, a black vinyl cave of safety. The driver is weighty, he knows New York wherever in the world he is from, the streets forming a tree of knowledge in the computer of his brain, and there's his driver's license, looking kind of like yours, the distorted humanity we present when the state is behind the camera, the photo taken when he could never imagine that his medallion would lose so much value, his retirement erased, confronting me with his name in block letters by the back of his head. So what if it smells like french fries and mildew? It's the only form of transportation when you're desperate, leaving the ER at 4 in the morning with a broken wrist. I even love that stupid screen, alternating Jimmy Fallon and Sade Baderinwa on a loop that doesn't exist in the rest of the world but is presented just for tourists to say hey, you've arrived and a shit ton is happening whether you like it or not. It's a New York City ritual, capped by giving a tip, cash in his hand, or a spit of a mini receipt, whether he smiles or growls in his rearview mirror and says thank you miss or sayonara bitch. There is an exchange. An acknowledgment.

It's all so much better than a random person in any old car not caring where you get out. Sorry, that's just how I feel. The love of a yellow taxi cab is a form of confidence, a sense of belonging, like that moment when you know your hand in the air has been spotted and the car swerves across three lanes to come get you.

~

Nancy Agabian is the author of Me as her again: True Stories of an Armenian Daughter (aunt lute books), a memoir that was honored as a Lambda Literary Award finalist for LGBT Nonfiction and shortlisted for a William Saroyan International Writing Prize, and Princess Freak (Beyond Baroque Books), a collection of poetry, prose, and performance art texts. Her novel, The Fear of Large and Small Nations, was a finalist for the 2016 PEN/Bellwether Prize for Socially-Engaged Fiction. For her contribution to letters and queer activism, she was awarded Lambda Literary Foundation's Jeanne Cordova Prize for Lesbian/Queer Nonfiction in 2021. She currently serves on the board of directors of the International Armenian Literary Alliance. Recently, Nancy started a new chapter in her life, taking care of her elderly parents in southeastern Massachusetts, where she lives.

BIG NOSE PROBLEMS

Stand-up comedy by Narek Zakharyan

Watch here

Narek Zakharyan is an Armenian comedian. He started performing comedy in Shanghai, China in 2018. He performs in English, Russian, and Chinese. He has been the opening act for some headliners from the US. He performed also in the Vietnam comedy Competition where he wasn't booed off stage.

THE CUP, IN TWO PARTS

Levon Kafafian

Golden hour descends upon the cushions and drapes of the guest room, lending a warm glow to the rust-orange trims, softening the emeralds and jades. Accompanied by a gentle breeze, the rays of light activate dust motes in the air, setting a tone of magical stillness despite the buzz of activity outside the window. Maryam sits in her armchair as if a throne, overseeing the affairs on the street below, wistfully lost in their miniature movements. Mesmerized, she is visited by memories of a time long past. She embraces them like old friends she's not likely to meet again.

Maro enters the room in silent steps carrying a copper gilded tray laden with short, ornate cups filled to the brim and topped with creamy brown foam. Maryam thanks Maro with a slow nod and pulls a sweet from the tray, easing back into the present. The two share a series of quiet moments, occasionally blowing steam from their cups. Maryam takes her first tentative sip, smiles, and begins to divulge an epic tale of spirits and time.



art by Juliana Marachlian Nersessian

Maro's expressions are easy to read, betraying any attempts to hide just how eager they are to learn the lore of grandmother's clan. The drama of Maryam's story intensifies, illuminating the room in complex patterns of soft green flame, her words wending through the space like a translucent snake. Her telling is peppered with flourishing exaggerations and wild gestures of hand.

She turns over her cup.

Time is transformed, suspended into a thick viscous substance turning every heartbeat into the sounding of a cannon. Maro is completely entranced, not yet realizing that this has been a lesson in reading the future in the dregs of the cup. Maryam flips her cup again, tilting it into the light, allowing the thin porcelain to glow between the dark alluvium of coffee.

A different hand holds the cup now against a stark blue sky.

Carefully examining every angle, every minute detail, the archaeologist turns the largest shard of the cup in his hands.
Notes are being taken, logged.

Glazed porcelain potsherd measuring 37MPT by 12MPT found in flamepoint cultural complex **C4J9**, *Karagraglu* dig site #6.

From sedimentary layering the artifact appears to date from between 1000 X.E.D. and 1100 X.E.D.

Exterior pattern is worn, 35% visible.

CuO ceramic glazes are intact, though colors have dulled.

Decorations seem to mimic snakeskin and flames.

Unknown brown particulate residue lingers on sherd interior, mixed slightly with soil sediment.

Another archaeologist approaches dressed in the same drab asymmetrical uniform.

"Find anything interesting, Naz?"

“Take a look. I’ve never seen such a chaotic blend of organic and geometric styles in one artifact. Do you think this was used as a ritual object? Maybe some symbol for the need to reconcile civilization and nature?”

“Look, whatever it is, this is exactly what the museum director is looking for—and just what we need to boost our funding! We’ll be able to dig up this whole section of the city thanks to this junky old piece of clay.”

“You might not value this like I do, but—akh! I’ve got to wrap this up, I need to jet to my next job site!”

“Oh, right, you don’t live in company housing, do you?”

“Is that even a question? You *know* my background—I’d never even qualify for company housing.”

~

This short story is an excerpt from a longer work in progress graphic novel. Portal Fire is a series of immersive, multimedia narrative experiences telling the story of non-binary orphan Maro in a Southwest Asian inspired parallel world, their prophetic coming of age, the return of fire magic to the people and the collapse of the established social hierarchy. The characters in this excerpt are inspired by my grandmother, my younger self, and the questions future generations will contend with about our past and present.

~

Levon Kafafian tells stories of hybridity, healing and transition, weaving the worlds they envision into tangible objects and ephemeral, sensory experiences. Their practice is fluid and playful, moving from costume and ritual to poetry and thematic social happenings. They employ textile processes to build characters, worlds and scenarios that live beyond modern day borders, gender norms and time, dreaming of obscured pasts and potential futures through a queer diasporic lens.



Juliana Marachlian Nersessian

Juliana Marachlian Nersessian is a 29-year-old Brazilian artist who lives in São Paulo. She has a degree in Visual Arts from Centro Universitário Belas Artes. Together with her friend Carolina Barbosa, she created the duo Lanó in 2014, in which they work with large-scale mural paintings. Juliana grew up within the Armenian community in Brazil and at age 27 began to feel a desire to unite her ancestry with her art. She then began, alongside her work with murals, to make digital illustrations of Armenian women based on old photographs. Researching photographs to understand more about clothes, patterning, typical elements is a way for Juliana to connect her origins and this generation of women who lived before her. Through the expressions and wrinkles of these women, the artist seeks to evoke a little of Armenian history.

To see more works of Armenian women go to the artist's instagram [@juliana.m.nersessian](https://www.instagram.com/juliana.m.nersessian)

To see Lanó's work go to the Instagram [@lano_art](https://www.instagram.com/lano_art)

MURDER OF ART

Jane Partizpanyan

Rage

Pour forth to fill every page
With liars, pagans, heathens and gods
Made up stories of useless melodrama

Betrayal

Knife my back with perfect precision
I bleed over Iliads and Odysseys
With all implications of war

Murder

You have killed your only redemption
I bleed red upon your rage and condemnation
Forgiving every one

Growth

Opine if you'd like
With pomegranates at your feet
Apricots around your head

Art

I am one with my pen
Dipping the quill in my own demise
Make art
Make drama
Make love
In red ink and red stained journals

MY rage
Can no longer subside
Abstract image
You and I

Logos
Literature and love
Light and language
Lethargy and lace

~

Jane Partizpanyan is a 21-year-old journalism and public relations major at California State University, Northridge. She is considered to be in the top 10% of the student academic body of the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communications at CSUN. Jane is also a contributor to the Daily Sundial news outlet at her university and writes poetry in her free time. She wrote her first poem when she was 10 years old. The following poems encapsulate the process of betrayal, anger, and forgiveness. One can experience betrayal in a multitude of ways, whether it's within an interpersonal relationship or on a massive scale with repercussions that can affect an entire country. Armenians are well acquainted with betrayal and its immediate effects, especially with the tragedy of the 2020 Artsakh war. But beyond that betrayal, there lies so much more. A hope, a dream of what's to come.

YOU CAN HAVE IT

after Philip Levine

Sarah Elgatian

Patrick starts in the basement. He
checks the laces on his boots
and wades a few steps into the flood.

He reaches, bends his wrists, fingers
not as dexterous as he remembers,
somehow thirty years have aged his hands.
Arthritic, they shake over the wire lock on the cage.

There was calm for such a short time and
always in the wrong place,
crusted with dirt and sweating.
I think now there was never calm.
In 1991 in the city Stepanakert
In 1915 in the city of Aleppo
In 1865 in the city of Yerevan

no one wakened or died,
no one walked the streets or was baptized,
for there was no such year
and these cities have now fallen off all the old newspapers,
erased from maps and travelogues,
textbooks and wedding certificates.

I give you back 1915.
I give you all the years from 1865 to this one. Give me
back those two mountains, those two million lives,
give Patrick back his sleep,
away from the basement where he carries a small,
barefoot woman over coal and glass and through flood.
Let him never wonder if she knew
it wasn't thunder when she
held the children she couldn't save.
Let him wake with his wife and his son in his suburb
and let him have his calm.

~

*Sarah Elgatian is a second-generation Armenian-American with a lot of questions. Her paternal grandparents came to the United States through Ellis Island, barely escaping the Armenian genocide. She was born and raised in the Quad Cities and later moved to Chicago and Seattle before returning to Iowa. As a writer, she primarily writes nonfiction focusing on survival. Her writing has been published, among other places, in the Iowa Writers' House print anthology *We The Interwoven* and has been nominated for *Best of the Net*. She likes bright colors, dark coffee, and long sentences.*

WHEREVER HOME IS

Elen Nahapetyan

Watch here

"Wherever home is" is about the life of Paul Manook. Born in Iraq, in an Armenian family, he later moved to the UK to study, where he stayed forever. But his cultural background never was forgotten. It is no secret how widespread the Armenian Diaspora is. And the main hero of our documentary is a great example of that. All of his youth he spent on the roads until he found his new home in Northern Ireland. But a home where every corner reminds him of his hometown in Iraq and his motherland Armenia. This is a story that many Armenians can relate to as this is the reality for so many of us.

~

Elen Nahapetyan is a young filmmaker from Armenia. When she was 17, she moved from her motherland to Ireland for her studies. One of the hardest things that she had to do. To cope with the constant feeling of missing home and family, she found the Armenian diaspora. And yes, she was able to do that even in Northern Ireland to make this short film about them. In the future, she hopes to create more projects relating to Armenia, Armenian culture and our people. It is important to shed light on different issues and explore various important storylines through film. And she hopes that by watching this little film, it will show you the hardships of immigration, but will also put a smile on your face.



Karine Khachatryan

Karine Khachatryan is a 20-year-old student living in England. She was born in Yerevan and grew up in a family full of artists. This encouraged her deep-rooted love for art. Currently she studies art history at the University of UEA and enjoys drawing in her free time. Unsurprisingly, most of her sketches revolve around Armenian culture. Here are some of her illustrations of women in Taraz.



THE VANA CAT

Nareh Ayvazyan

tell me your sorrows –
and I'll shelve them along my ribs for upkeeping

share your nightmares with my most playful river –
and she'll take them far away from here

the serene moon rolls out from behind holy mountains
purifying the *Saryan* landscapes –
moving across deep forests and golden prairies,
offering prayers for the end of times

the house of Gods on *sar Nemrut* stands tall and somber as ever –
watching over the bleeding lands,
as a parent observes the first shaky steps of his toddler

expectant, *hopeful* for true reincarnation

there's struggle in every gorge –
a song and a hearty dance in every rock

meanwhile, a chalky cat, high in spirits, heads for a swim in lake Van
it never had to leave that which it calls home

THE FUNERAL

Nareh Ayvazyan

eight ravens wound in a circle,
praying
honoring the passage of time
they're less by one but not the less for it
as they send their kin off with a high whine

it's not mindless clamor or idle animal noise
it's all intentional –
they're holding vigil for the one they held close.
their parting speeches incessant, it tears at your soul,
the anguish and longing in their howls.

they'll part and leave come morning,
not sooner, not later
they've truly learned to mourn by the feather.

people love to dishonor death by saying “life goes on”
but if you're not a raven sometimes,
screaming at time to stop, to *hold*,
then you don't know how to mourn

~

Nareh Ayvazyan is an English teacher and a (BA) Linguistics and Foreign Languages graduate from Armenia. She's an emerging writer, interested in Gothic fiction and experimental poetry. She's also been studying Japanese for over three years now and wants to be able to translate Japanese literature into Armenian one day. She hails from Constantinople, Karin and Yerevan, a common theme in all her works.

THE ONES WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND: AN ARMENIAN STORY

Holly Malkasian

When I finally met my great-uncle Hagop on a family trip to Florida, I immediately asked to see the inside of his forearm. He extended his seventy-year-old limb and amongst the wisps of white hair and folded skin, I could see the faint ink markings delineating the cross. Morakuyr, my great-aunt and Hagop's sister, had marked him a Christian with indelible ink when he was four years old. She was a precocious girl all of ten. It was risky. He could have been slaughtered like the rest of the family and he came very close. The Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire was eliminated every way one can imagine—gassing, burning, deliberate starvation, deportation death marches, and gunning down. The holocaust of World War I set the stage for the holocaust of World War II less than thirty years later. “After all, who remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?” Hitler stated. History repeats with no accountability.

The first time I saw Morakuyr, years before I met Hagop, she was sitting in her car in my driveway when I arrived home from school. “I'm your aunt, let me in your house.” She rolled the window closed, opened the door and seized her solid suitcase by the squared handle and followed me up the driveway and into my home. The suitcase barely cleared the pavement but stayed firmly under her control. I wasn't sure who she was but I recognized the thick Armenian accent and the look: dark almond-shaped eyes, olive skin, and a short but solid frame. When I saw her face, I recognized Grandma who had passed away the year before. Settling herself into a chair at the kitchen table waiting for my parents to arrive home from work, she reached into her black oversized satchel and pulled out one cigarette and a small pair of scissors. With one swift snip, she cut the cigarette in half and then reached back into her bag to dig around for a match.

“Why did you cut that cigarette?” I wanted to know.

“I'm quitting,” and then she slowly inhaled. Squirming in my seat, uncomfortable with this stranger, I exhaled when my parents walked through the kitchen door. As soon as he saw her, my father wrapped his arms around her and boomed, “Maritza!”

Realizing she never told me her name, I echoed him with a cheerful, “Maritza!”

She quickly turned on her heels and scowled at me (what my mother called the “Malkasian black look”) and said, “YOU call me Morakuyr (aunt), NEVER Maritza.”

She was my father’s aunt and my great-aunt but because of my age, I wasn’t allowed to call her by her name. That was her first visit to our home in Wellesley, a suburb of Boston, because she had lived in another state before then. Morakuyr visited often and each visit she stayed for weeks at a time. I never saw her smoke again and I never called her Maritza again.

Before I met her, I had heard about her. She was Grandma’s sister and she had survived the Armenian Genocide when she was a young girl, the same age as me when I first met her. My father made sure I heard the story of the family slaughter and he often retold the history so I wouldn’t forget. But when Morakuyr was visiting, Dad didn’t bring it up for fear of traumatizing her with the brutal memories of her childhood. Morakuyr kept busy all day, every day, and maybe that was her means of coping with the past. Her focus was the kitchen where she had control and could feed the people she loved. “Starving Armenians” was a common lexicon in the American press as the reports of the Genocide by the Ottoman Turks headlined in leading newspapers across the United States. No way was Morakuyr going to have any starving Armenians on her watch.

Once Morakuyr was entrenched in our home, I wasn’t caught off guard when I arrived after school. I burst through the back door to the smells of sumac, cumin, and rising dough. Standing at the counter, Morakuyr’s sturdy hands were deep in a bowl mixing ingredients or expertly slicing vegetables. One day I bounded up behind her and snuck a pinch of meat, popping it into my mouth.

“No, no tsakis (sweetheart), you can’t eat it like that!”

“But Morakuyr, it’s kayma!”

“Voch! This is for lemejun not kayma,” Moyakuyr informed. Lemejun, a thin-crust lamb pizza, couldn’t be eaten raw. Morakuyr guided me to the table with her hands on my shoulders and placed a stack of filo dough and a small bowl of melted butter in front of me. She brushed a sheet of the dough hastily with the melted butter, filling the center with a dollop of a mixture of shredded cheeses and parsley. Folding the thin film of dough into a symmetrical triangle, glancing at me to make sure I was watching her, she then put the finished boreg on a large greased baking sheet. She handed me the pastry brush to continue the job while she returned to the counter to finish the lemejun.

The requirements for her recipes, entirely inscribed in her memory, extended beyond the limits of our cabinets and the grocery store. Morakuyr, in her calf-length shapeless dresses, paced the backyard with her head bent toward the earth, inspecting the grass. At intervals she squatted to the ground and with a firm grip, throttled her

target. She stood up holding the pale red tubular stem of a weed with green rubbery leaves and roots covered in dirt. After placing the pickings in a large metal bowl perched on her hip she continued on her quest. This trolling lasted for hours as she methodically rooted out the weeds, which she collected to make bunjalboud stew. Today, purslane, the weeds from the lawn, is sold as a super food.

Even though I never knew we had food invading the grass in our lawn, I was not surprised. My family had a harvesting ritual that no other family living in Wellesley shared. Grandma and Aunt Stella, my father's sister, lived in a two-family home in Watertown, an Armenian community just west of Boston, where I was dropped off every weekend during my childhood. I attended Sunday school at Saint James Armenian Apostolic Church and then my parents came to collect me on Sunday afternoons. We would leave after chicken and pilaf dinner and this tradition continued even after Grandma passed away. Heading back to Wellesley, there was a preferred hunting ground along a narrow, forested road. As Dad slowed the family station wagon and pulled over to the shoulder of the road, I examined the woods from the back seat. I had been schooled in botany from a young age and immediately spotted the wild grape vines tucked amongst the poison ivy and bramble. In the month of June, the young leaves are at their peak for dolma, stuffed grape leaves. Any later, and they would be too tough. I slunk low in my seat, crossed my arms over my belly, and huffed dramatically. Morakuyr stuck her elbow in my side and nudged me. Sliding out of the car, keeping low, I hoped none of my blueblood friends from Wellesley drove by and saw my family foraging in the brush. I stayed close to the car, a shield from onlookers, but Morakuyr pushed past the snarl and nettles wading deep into the woods. She was particular about the leaves, scanning the foliage for the perfect size. Neatly piling them one on top of another, each peak lined up, until she had two full stacks. We handed our bundles to her so she could organize the rest on the way home.

“The Turks killed off the Armenian men first, a strategy leaving the rest of the community vulnerable,” Dad continued educating me when Morakuyr wasn't around. His jaw stiffened and eyes narrowed as the anger controlled his face. “Only cowards attack defenseless women, children, and the elderly.” It was hard for me to make the connection between the senior woman who inserted herself into our family and the ten-year-old girl whose parents and siblings were murdered in front of her. I knew how this family tragedy played out. It was the backdrop of my life.

The Turkish soldiers kicked down the door and dragged them outside shoving them to the ground with the butts of their rifles—my great-grandparents, and the children: Angele, Satenig, Sisag, Anna, Hovhaness, Hagop. They slit Araxie’s throat looking for jewels they thought she was hiding. Morakuyr, a slight girl, spied the soldiers from inside the house. When she heard the gunfire, she rolled herself up in a worn Oushak that covered the floor. She held her breath until the silence returned, until she heard the sobs from her little brother Hagop who was clinging to the lifeless body of their mother. “Blood-thirsty Turks,” my father labeled. He didn’t use racial slurs and refused to stereotype, but the Armenian Genocide was different. I looked down. I looked at the ceiling. I looked anywhere but directly at my father. Fiddling with my ruby birthstone ring, I wanted the horror of the family massacres to go away.

Separated for years in the chaos of the war and the targeting of the Armenians, Morakuyr found Hagop at the end of World War I when western relief workers swarmed the area to save the fragment of survivors scattered across the Armenian provinces. Morakuyr was among the children who emerged from the shadows to be saved under the protective custody of the humanitarian authorities. As she scanned the broken children slumped on the ground, she spotted Hagop. She hadn’t seen him since soon after the murder of their parents. Keeping her tear-filled eyes fixed, she raced to him and grabbed the twig of his upper arm. Hagop froze with a terrified expression. He was too young to remember his sister or his Armenian roots. Without waiting to see what she wanted, he wrested his way free and bolted back toward the Arab home where he had lived as a servant boy for almost two years. Morakuyr, refusing to lose him forever, sprinted after him. She tackled him in the hardened earth, kicking up a storm of dried soil, and dragged him back to the relief workers with a vice grip now controlling the twig and the rest of his bony body. Morakuyr pointed at the marking she had tattooed in his flesh, “Look!” she sobbed, “He is Armenian! A Christian. He is my brother!”

The violence of what she witnessed was buried deep inside her; Morakuyr was never angry or sullen. Morakuyr was a firm and cheerful woman who had a wry sense of humor. “Anvayel!” (naughty) she cried out as she bubbled up with laughter sitting in the stuffed armchair in our wood-paneled family room. My parents were out to dinner and Morakuyr and I had settled in to watch television. I turned the knob and flipped between channels until I found the movie *Animal House*. Immediately engaged, I wasn’t sure Morakuyr would like it as much as I did. “Anvayel,” she howled with peals of laughter, her short, round body shook with each gasp of giggles as the frat boys got sloppy drunk, threw wild parties, and had sex with the dean’s wife. “Morakuyr, I’ll change the channel,” I offered. “Che, che Tsakoos, it’s okay. Leave it.” My eyes darted toward the door, keeping an eye out

for my parents, hoping they didn't walk in and catch us. Morakuyr, completely entertained, continued to chortle at the lewd antics in the movie as I squirmed but kept my eyes wide open.

Many years later, when Morakuyr and Dad had passed away, I longed to understand more about the Armenian Genocide. An uncomfortable history I didn't know how to assimilate as a youth, I wanted more information as an adult. When I married and had two sons, I felt responsible to educate them, to carry on the oral history my father passed to me. Although I knew our family story, I knew the basic time frame of the Genocide and I knew Turkey denied the history, I really didn't know much more than that. As I aged, something nagged at me to dig deeper, and I felt an internal push to piece together the fragments of information I had learned as a child. I wanted to understand the back story of the Genocide and I had to know the justifications Turkey used to obliterate their past. Opening my laptop, I typed into the search bar "Books on the Armenian Genocide." I scrolled down the first page listing the titles and then to the next page, and the next. I thought the Armenian Genocide was an obscure holocaust but it was well-chronicled even in the face of Turkish denialism. When I started my personal investigation, I wasn't prepared for the gore. Or the tailspin it would put me in.

I loaded the virtual cart with books by Armenians as well as non-Armenians. Choosing titles written by eyewitnesses, survivors, historians, and genocide scholars, I had a full range of material to start my pursuit. After a week, a large heavy box was delivered to my back porch. I held each book in my hands re-reading the titles that I had ordered. Cracking open the spines, I shuffled through the pages, pausing at the photos. I saw images of severed human heads on pedestals with Turkish officials standing next to them. I saw dead children and babies lying in contorted positions with each rib outlined and their heads sunken to skeleton shapes, just the skin clinging to the bones. I paused at a photo of a mass grave of bodies in dirt ditches with blood-soaked clothing, a scene similar to the one my father had described about the massacre of our family. Lifeless bodies of girls were hanging from nooses and others were nailed to crosses, in imitation and mockery of the Crucifixion of Christ. I scanned a photo of a walking caravan of Armenian women holding babies in their arms as Turkish soldiers rode on horses forcing them out of their ancient homeland.

I hadn't even read a page yet and I was overcome with grief. Eyes bloated with tears, standing under the covered porch, I looked out at the messy backyard where my sons had been playing before school. Two bikes scattered on the grass, a baseball bat, a

lacrosse stick, and assorted balls littered the lawn. The peace was broken only by the sound of chattering squirrels chasing one another up the pine trees in the back of the yard. Crumpling into the rigid teak chair on the porch, I hung my head in my hands.

I had heard about the massacres for years, but the photos sharpened the carnage from a blurry background to center stage. I focused my eyes and swallowed hard trying to get rid of the boulder in my throat. After all, I had wanted this; I wanted the knowledge. I could have dumped the books back in the box and lugged it to the attic. Bury the past like the Turkish government did and pretend it didn't happen. But that felt like betrayal and I couldn't do it. My family had melted into the American pot but how do you melt away the past? Trauma has a way of traveling through generations. I headed upstairs, straining under the heavy box, and closed the door to the study. Sitting down at the desk, I reached for *Ambassdor Morgenthau's Story*, written by Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at the start of World War I.

Greedily turning the pages, I consumed every word. Morgenthau echoed what I had heard for years and I hated that everything my father told me was true. Outraged at the cold determination of the Ottoman leaders to destroy a race, Morgenthau pleaded with the triumvirate in power, Talat, Enver, and Djemel, to halt their genocidal mission. The deportations of the Armenians had one goal and Morgenthau knew the plan for the Armenians:

“ . . . the Turks never had the slightest idea of reestablishing the Armenians in this new country. They knew that the great majority would never reach their destination and that those who did would either die of thirst and starvation, or be murdered by the wild Mohammedan desert tribes. The real purpose of the deportation was robbery and destruction; it really represented a new method of massacre.” (P.309)

I continued to take in everything I could about the Genocide: books, articles, academic lectures at Columbia University and Manhattanville College. I learned the Armenian civilization dated from 2500 B.C. on the Anatolian Plateau and fell to the Seljuk Turkish invasions in the 11th Century. Historic Armenia was split between the Ottoman Empire in the west and the Russian Empire in the east. The Ottoman government, Turkish Muslim rulers, had a longstanding policy of discrimination against the Christians. The Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians all suffered. In the hierarchal system, Christians were beneath Muslims and were commonly referred to as 'dogs' in the society.

Starting in the mid-1800s, western missionaries arrived to aid their fellow Christians. Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301 AD and Armenians have fiercely held onto their religion. American colleges and universities also sent graduates and established schools including Mount Holyoke Female Seminary of Bitlis, The American School of Erzerum, The American School in Van, The American College of Mersovan, and many others. As they fanned out across Ottoman-controlled Western Armenia, the westerners brought progressive ideas of human rights, setting up resentment and tensions with the government. During the same period when the Armenians were advancing and strengthening ties to the west, the Ottoman Empire was collapsing and the economy was in shambles. The Armenians who were subject to persecution and random massacres under Ottoman rule were now demonized and targeted for destruction.

In the midst of the crisis in the Ottoman empire, World War I broke out and Turkey allied itself with Germany. Wartime provided an auspicious time for the Turkish leaders to finalize the “Armenian Question.” The European powers, who kept an eye on the Ottoman rulers and warned them about their treatment of the Christians, were focused on war and could no longer meddle in the business of the empire. The triumvirate in power led a campaign to rid the land of the indigenous Christians, and the final extermination of the Armenian race from their homeland began in 1915 and continued to 1923.

Frederick Davis Greene, an American missionary living in Armenia under Ottoman rule, wrote a book about the institutional crimes, *Armenian Massacres or The Sword of Mohamed*. The book is a series of scenes describing the debase horror at the hands of government agents. He wrote:

“A lot of women . . . were shut up in a church, and the soldiers were let ‘loose’ among them. Many were outraged to death, and the remainder dispatched with sword and bayonet. Children were placed in a row, one behind another and a bullet fired down the line to see how many could be dispatched with one bullet. Infants and small children were piled one on the other and their heads struck off.”

As I poured over the volumes of information, I realized my father wasn’t exaggerating and that our family’s history is not unique amongst Armenians. He actually spared me from the most traumatic aspects and sadistic acts committed during the Genocide.

Was it too painful for him to detail the depravity of the massacres? My father never spoke to me of the sexual violence, but I am sure he knew. Possibly he couldn't utter the savagery to his only daughter. Was his rigid posture and tightened face an attempt to control an emotional breakdown? I couldn't stop thinking of Morakuyr. There is a gap in her story. I know Hagop was a servant boy in an Arab home after their parents were murdered, but where was Morakuyr? I try to remember if she had a tattoo, a mark of ownership as a sex slave in a Turkish harem. I can't stand to think of her, a small girl, being violently raped by men hellbent on destroying a race.

Each book built upon what I had already read. I was rubbernecking the atrocities and couldn't stop myself. The stories I read painted the same picture of assault, torture, and murder from a vast area. It wasn't one isolated region. Looking at it rationally, there are no Armenians in the ancient homeland of Western Armenia, now the eastern half of Turkey. Where did they go? Based on that fact alone, logic dictates something dramatic happened. The ruins of Armenian schools and churches in historic Western Armenia makes an interpretation unnecessary.

One book that particularly hit home was Tacy Atkinson's memoir, *The German, the Turk, and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance; Harpoot Diaries*. Atkinson was an American missionary stationed in Harpoot, my family's place of origin, and in her testimony, she named the Armenians she befriended, treated in her hospital, and sheltered from the menacing Turkish gendarmes. I held my breath waiting for the name Kizirbohosian or Malkasian. Hurriedly turning each page, shoulders tightening up into my ears, I desperately wanted an affirmation of the family members we lost. If Atkinson knew them, I reasoned, then I would know them also. It would be my connection to their souls if she revealed some small bit of information about their lives or their personalities. I was disappointed when she didn't mention the names, although part of me was relieved. I wanted to find a link to my family but couldn't stand to learn any more details about their ruthless murder.

A sepia-toned photo of the family taken in Harpoot before the Genocide rests on my bedroom dresser. It sits at eye level and beckons me as I pass by. The picture was torn in half but somehow survived even though all but two in the photo did not. The tear in the middle of the image is a reminder of the destruction that shattered the family. My great-grandparents stare out at me with a stoic look. My great-aunts and uncles, infants to teenagers, do the same. Morakuyr wears a billowing pinafore dress and a white bow in her shoulder-length raven hair. She draws me in as we fix our gazes on each other. Hagop, a toddler in a tailored jacket and dark slacks, stands between his father's knees. How much

did they know at the time when the photo was taken? My great-grandparents had lived through the massacres of the Armenians leading up to the 1915 Genocide, the Hamidian pogroms in 1894, and the Adana massacres in 1909, the time when my grandmother left them to come to the United States. But did they have any inclination the worst was yet to come? Did they suspect their lives would be violently terminated? I talk to them when no one is around. I tell them they are remembered and they deserved a just government.

One Sunday when I brought my sons to Saint Gregory's Armenian Church for Christian education, I walked through the doors spitting mad about the latest injustices I had read in my hyper-focused research. The first person I saw was Mark, the volunteer superintendent of the Sunday school, and I didn't hold back as I spewed my disgust about the injustice, about the lack of responsibility from the Turkish government, about the sickening horrors the Armenians had endured. Mark, a quiet, deeply religious man, gave me space for my tirade and then softly replied, "I will not let the Genocide define me or destroy my life." I snapped to a full stop, the emotion draining from me. It was a micro moment that had a huge impact and I immediately understood: Refuse to live your life as a victim. Don't forget or accept the injustice but don't let it take away your peace. Wrath, left unchecked, consumes you. I could either get bitter or get better.

I climbed the stairs from the school building up to the church for badarak, the Armenian mass. Pulling open the heavy wooden door, I felt the warmth of the sun streaming down into the sanctuary from the windows in the celestial dome. Smoky incense clouded above the parishioners and the priest's baritone voice sang the Bible in Ancient Armenian. Slipping into a pew, I scanned the sacred space. I saw doctors, lawyers, engineers, financial wizards, professors, and successful entrepreneurs. I saw my close friends: Vahan who was born in Beirut and moved to the United States when he was six. Nectar who grew up in Jordan and Maria in Syria. Allenoush immigrated to the United States from Iran. Armenians whose families had been forcibly ripped out of their homeland and all had similar stories of vicious loss and unbearable suffering. All are descendants of survivors who re-established themselves in majority Muslim countries after the Genocide and were allowed to openly practice Christianity at the time.

It is often said that the last stage of genocide is denial and Elie Weisel described the Armenian Genocide as an "open wound" because of the lack of accountability or retribution for the crimes against humanity by the Turkish government. Each Armenian family has a story to tell and each has pain to heal. There are no Armenians in historical Western Armenia. There are no graves to pay respect or utter a prayer for my ancestors or the one and a half million Armenians who lost their lives at the hands of the Ottoman government. Mounds of rubble are all that is left of the churches and Armenian property

and businesses have been seized. I want the Turkish government to admit their genocidal past and I want compensation for the Armenians. Turkey risks its soul by bargaining with the truth. I'm angry and I won't forget but I can look back and still move forward.

As I sat in church surrounded by the close-knit community, I reached into my pocket and fingered a lace doily Morakuyr had crocheted. An intricate design of thin thread woven into a circle, it is delicate but sturdy enough to protect surfaces. I see Morakuyr in my memory and she is laughing and nourishing the ones she loved. She had scars from the life that was ripped from her but she survived and wouldn't let the past destroy her present. "Der Vorghmya, Der Vorghmya, Der Vorghmya" — "Lord have mercy, lord have mercy, lord have mercy," the congregation echoed the priest. I faced the towering arch above the altar and read the raised letters highlighted in gold. "Աստված սէր է." God is Love.

Previously published in *The Abstract Elephant Magazine*



photography by Anashe Barton taken from her film Janapar out winter 2021

Anashe Barton

"*Janapar* is a film directed by Anashe and her co-producer Caro Yagjian. We explored the work of various Armenian and soviet filmmakers and used them as a visual starting point to craft our abstract narrative on loss and healing. The outline for our film was developed collectively with local Armenian creatives contributing their unique skill set. Over the course of five months, we planned, prepped the film's story arc, mapping each scene and developing a shot list. Recently, on the eve of the Armenian Genocide commemoration, we had our first shoot date and the project was officially underway. We seek to reach an audience beyond our own Armenian community to educate and inform them about our cause and look outward towards how we fit into our greater world. You can follow along on our Instagram page @janaparfilm."



Anashe is a recent graduate of UC Berkeley. She loves exploring her love of film photography, cinematography, and music. She has been a longtime advocate for Armenian causes throughout her life and most recently has directed a short film about the diasporan Armenian community's experience through the Artsakh War. She has a passion for human rights advocacy, development policy, and international relations. She currently lives in San Francisco.



MY GRANDFATHER SUFFERS A FATAL HEART ATTACK AFTER CLIMBING THREE FLIGHTS OF STAIRS

Michael Minassian

When I arrived
at my grandparent's apartment
in the Bronx, my grandmother
cried when she saw me.

She told me they had come home
from a party when my grandfather
slumped on the couch—
He never woke up, she said.

I wandered into their bedroom
and saw his watch on the nightstand—
next to the watch was a water glass
with his false teeth inside.

The EMTs had removed his dentures
and handed them to my grandmother—
I imagined they spoke to her
as she placed them in the glass.

I could hear words
gurgling underwater—
how could he be dead
and his teeth still speak to me?

I listened to his voice tell me
how far he had traveled
from Armenia to America,
leaving behind the unmarked graves

of his parents, first wife, and child,
and the songs the dead still sing,
if you listened closely,
if you remembered them at all.

Michael Minassian is 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, Morning Calm, and A Matter of Timing are all available on Amazon. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

ICE CREAM IN REPUBLIC SQUARE

Charents Apkarian

Everything emits a low hum:
open sky
building
ferris wheel
the boys in a line with their ice cream.
It's stuck in my head,
this chalky aftertaste sadness.
I know that I lost you because I was afraid.
I know it's the burden of my race
to lose ground to the advancing
enemy over and over. Your name
is one of the forbidden words, spoken over
and over. The boys remember
themselves, drifting
from the fountain to the city,
the sun grinning like sweet corn.

Charents Apkarian is a half-Armenian poet from Chicago, Il. His work has never before been published in a professional setting. In 2019, he graduated from Kenyon College with a degree in creative writing. He enjoys hip hop, shawarma, and stand-up comedy.

OPEN LETTER: INDEPENDENCE GENERATION, SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

Arman Ghaloosian

Dear Respectful Compatriots, you've been through quite an ordeal these last 30 years. You've seen two wars, decades of corruption and a revolution. Our ancient nation that lives through our young state, has faced many endeavours. The history of our people, the youthful nature of the Republic of Armenia, has brought us to this moment. Congratulations, it is because of you that we have hope for the future. Yes, it is because of you. Our soldiers guarding the front, our doctors caring for the people, our teachers educating the next generation of young minds and all those who inspire us every day. Your immense role garners immense responsibility, but also a much-needed appreciation. The diaspora is with you. My tone might suggest a separation, but in fact it is quite the opposite. We remain at your side like we always have and always will. There may be those within the vast Armenian nation at home and abroad who may disagree with certain approaches and methods, but we all seek the same end-goal. A free, prosperous, and just Armenia. An Armenia where boundless opportunities await all of its children. But most importantly a state where the people are protected and feel they are cared for.

Dear Armenians, we are at a pivotal moment in our Republic's short history. I say we, because it is evident now more than ever that we should not be divided based on our various political, denominational, or regional affiliations. We must unite as a generation and help guide our country towards a better tomorrow. We have been blessed to witness the rebirth of our nation, with the declaration of our statehood 30 years ago today.

For all those who came before us, we must ensure that Armenia continues to progress and flourish. Because as you know, one day we too shall pass the torch to a new generation of Armenians raised by us, the generation of independence. Future generations will not have seen war and genocide or have lived through the ups and downs of the Soviet Union, the attempted strangling of our national consciousness, the

70 years of foreign domination and rule, wherein our nation survived. But our statehood was stripped from us and it was only a matter of time before our identity would fade along with it. We must ensure that future generations have the right to live in a free and secure Armenia.

Dear friends, we may disagree from time to time but we must remember to stay together. Lift each other up, speak to each other, hear one another out, and never cast any member of our small clan aside. So much of our past is scarred by the inability to understand one another, to listen to one another, and to care for one another. We are an eternal nation, a fierce people, a global community. Listen to one another, compromise, learn from each other, and do not seek power over one another. Instead seek to empower all those without.

Going forward, let us promise one another to do better and to be better. Not to constantly look for blame. We must accomplish what was once perceived to be impossible. What was once viewed as unthinkable and undeliverable. In doing so, we ensure that future generations continue this trend. A trend of doing better. We are what they one day will grow beyond. That is our true struggle, dear Compatriots. I would be lying to you if I said I had a master plan for us, but like you I am a humble servant of the ancient nation of Armenia. The nation that rose from the ashes of genocide. Our union is our strength, our survival and success are the rising tide. Do not look for division amongst one another, look for reasons to unite. Look for ways to help one another, to care for one another, and most importantly to love one another.

I too have been guilty of succumbing to hate, anger, and worst of all, to fear. But we must not give in and let these define our story. We must do better, dear friends. We are one people. The diaspora, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh are one. One mighty and courageous Armenia. Let us work together to make our way home. In whatever form that may take. Let us use our skills for this cause, to aid one another and to secure our independence for generations to come. This is our struggle, this is our duty, but also our destiny, a free homeland, the one thing we all truly desire.

Celebrate today, toast our noble soldiers, our committed educators and all our citizens. They have paved the way for us, now we must bridge the gap between the old and the new and unite our people towards a better tomorrow. A difficult task, but the power of unity can move mountains. We are yet to see this force, but it has always been there. The motherland is in need of all its children to create a better tomorrow. We can do it. Together, side by side, hand in hand, for our Dear Armenia.

NAMESAKE

Sebastian Sarkisian

You are what will be left in the dawn.
Your sweetness makes this all worth it,
and your innocence scares something out of me—
somebody?

Birth is beyond evil,
and destiny is their torment.
My teeth grin yet my mouth sags.

For the banquet,
a crown is being prepared,
but when you arrive, will you be recognized?
Please, it would please me
if you stayed familiar.

Sweetness, sweetness, my sweetest.
I once chose to believe,
and now when you're gone,
your phantom carries me forward.

I'm too weak to make my bed in the snow,
I'm too dumb to carve my name in the sky.
May I become a son among slaves,
to be saved from bitter soliloquy.

TOGETHER IN THE CHAIN OF PAIN

Tatevik Galoyan

drip drop

drip drop

“i was dismissed from my home”

moaned blood.

together in the chain of pain



photography by Anashe Barton

IN VAIN

Tatevik Galoyan

every time i open my mouth
a tiny voice awakens in me
and furiously longs
for breaking through the air
to shout
to confess
that
i am not well
i am not well
however at all times
i close my mouth
right away
and widen it
from ear
to ear.

in vain

~

Tatevik Galoyan was born and is currently living in Yerevan, Armenia. She has graduated from the Armenian State University of Economics. She is a poet, model and financial analyst. Her passion in writing began when she was a schoolgirl keeping a journal and writing her emotions in it. She'll be happy to receive your opinion concerning her poetry. You can find her on Instagram at @she.is.maisie.gal.

A STORY BY NOURP

Trigger warning: references to sexual assault

On June 7th at 8.36 pm, something happened to her. Something bad. At least she thought it was bad.

She was walking on the street, minding her own business in her loose-fitting pants. She'd just finished work and the weather was ideal for a stroll. She thought she'd stop by her favourite restaurant to take away some food. She was a vegetarian. Still is. Although she had some meat after the thing happened. BAD. But she felt like eating meat. That was the only thing she could digest.

A lot of people were out that Monday. She was walking alone. Looking around. Feeling alone.

She stopped at the red light. Others stopped as well. Like I said, there were so many people at this crosswalk. It reminded her of New York minus the tall buildings and the art scene and other cool stuff.

Green. She started walking again. Just crossing the road like she knew how to do. Crossing is not an insignificant action. It always represents a risk. You are walking safely and then the sidewalk ends and your attention must increase. Even on the zebra crossings you are vulnerable. She felt a slight touch on her bum. She turned around. He was smiling. Was it because of pride or shame? She asked him. No reply. She asked again. He denied it. So she pushed him. BAM. She slapped him. Surprisingly hard. She really could feel that she'd just given the perfect slap. Landed beautifully on his cheek.



photography by Meg Aghamyan

Something not to be ashamed of. Then time stopped. It was like an anvil falling down on her. And another one. She was still standing though. First thought was: it finally happened. All these years they'd warned her to ignore altercations. Don't reply. Let it go. With age she was less inclined to start a fight. In her twenties, she was angry all the time. Starting a fight whenever she felt abused. Or thought she was. Or even when she was not. She was still standing. Didn't want to collapse. She needed to follow him. He walked fast. She felt like all her teeth had fallen off. She counted them with her tongue. Lips were swollen. Blood. One person offered to call an ambulance. She started walking again. After him. Suddenly the street was empty. Just the two of them walking. Like on a desert island. In a nightmare.

Stop that police car! She screamed.

Stop it yourself, a lady replied.

This man hit me. Twice. Do something. Anyone. Please. She thought if this happened in another country someone would have helped for sure. Maybe the entire crowd. She was geographically unlucky.

As she saw a couple policemen walking towards her, she felt relieved. She ran to them but he was faster. He immediately grabbed one of them and started telling his own version. A smile on the policeman's face. He smiled too.

Second floor, room 225.

Can you read and write in Armenian? Do you need a translator? She did. So the policeman sitting behind his desk called one.

“He” was taken to another room. She never saw him again.

Telling a story that just happened to you is not a common thing. Usually you do it when something out of the ordinary happens. Bumping into an ex you were just thinking about two days ago, finding money on the street (never happens anymore) or witnessing a car accident.

After hearing her story, the elderly translator asked for her phone number. He suggested they could get together some time for dinner or a concern. She thought, now I will have two stories to tell. The only way this story could have become more absurd is if a pony had walked into the office, or the inspector who was typing the deposition turned out to be a zombie and proved out that all policemen in Armenia were drunken zombies, coming out of their graveyards, to make your life just a little bit worse. Her lip was swollen. So that's what it'd look like if I got botox, she thought.

I can see your upper lip is swollen. Well at least now you won't need to get botox like all the girls in Yerevan. The zombie policeman attempted a joke. She thought it was a bit funny. But laughing was painful.

This will either go to trial or be settled between the two of you. Would you like to leave your number so he can call you and apologise? She said ok while a sudden taste of blood came into her mouth.

Two head scans. One MRI. Headaches. Pills. Shaking in the middle of the night. Eating meat. Not digesting. Throwing up. 1 month. Then two. And then the phone rang.

She recognised his voice immediately. He apologised. He said that if she knew him, she would know that his gesture was nothing like him. He was a nice guy. Somehow, she thought there must be a certain truth in this. He could have run away but instead he came to the station. She thought about his mum. How weak she must have been raising him. Never raising her voice to him. She imagined her as a *Pietà*, kissing and licking his feet every morning as soon as he sat on the edge of his bed. *My hero.* She felt deep hatred towards her. Possibly more than towards him. She imagined the kind of things she'd say with a true conviction. *Boys will be boys, Men are different.*

I hit her but I didn't mean to. It's okay it happens. You didn't mean too. The nerve she had to call the police.

But then she thought hating someone without a face made no sense. She would wait for the trial to resume this feeling.

He was talking with the calmest voice, like a friend... or boyfriend. She thought if this thing didn't happen, maybe he could have been her boyfriend. But then he looks much younger than her. Maybe 15 years younger. She felt stupid thinking about that.

Her tone was firm. *I'll see you at the trial.* She hung up.
Trial movies were her favourite.

~

Nourp is a French-Armenian writer and theatre director currently living in Armenia.

Meg Aghamyan



The images seen above [and below] were made during her trip to Armenia in July 2021. The life and day-to-day interactions between people in Armenia always interested her. Every moment she observed on the streets was like a scene from an unwritten and unscripted movie. She had to carry her camera everywhere because she wanted to immortalize these instants which people might think of as ordinary but for her, it was once in a lifetime moment. This time around, Meg overcame her social awkwardness and actually approached the people and showed them the photographs she took. Many of them were caught off-guard and surprised at the fact that she would take her time to capture a second of their rather insignificant life. They were grateful to see the photos she took.



~

Meg Aghamyan was born and raised in Armenia. She moved to the United States when she was 12 years old and that's when she picked up photography. Ever since Meg turned 18, her hobby became a profession. She currently works as a freelance photographer and is attending university to complete her arts degree.

THERE IS A LAND

Emily Avakian

There Is A Land

that has yet to know my footprints
has yet to feel the vibration of my voice
that holds the bones of my ancestors
but to visit it I have yet to have the choice

There is a land that knows the secrets that my family left behind
whose borders have shifted throughout time

That land is a place I pray for
a place I yearn to see
one day when the waters have calmed
perhaps her borders will open and welcome me

Emily Avakian is currently based out of Charlottesville Virginia where she is a graduate student at the University of Virginia. She believes that the best way to honor one's identity is through creativity. In her work, she strives to honor her Parskahye (Armenian from Iran) heritage.

“DARK FRESCOES” AND DICHOTOMIES

a book review of Celeste Nazeli Snowber’s *The Marrow of Longing*
by John Danho

The Marrow of Longing navigates the (loud) trauma and (silent) victory of a fully lived life, and the words themselves dance quite like the observable world in a human cell under a microscope. A soft, primal song — owing to the solemnity of the subject matter — begs for attention and rewards it with a nucleic sound that attracts disparate modalities. The great challenge in composing this book review was therefore in curating a title out of the rich verses, lines, and phrases from Celeste Nazeli Snowber’s expansive poetry collection:

“**The Linguistics of Blood and Bone**” would have spoken to the way language *and* culture both settle and course within the body: a manner of stillness and of motion. Each piece in Celeste’s collection is born in-between worlds: Armenian, Irish, and Bostonian-American all play a part in *longing*, one sense-of-self reaching out to the other in the hopes of a companion. *Marrow* reflects and redefines the ‘becoming’ common to so many of us, allowing us space to taste and appreciate the vagaries common to human experience. Celeste’s collection therefore foregrounds each of its 54 poems with a light veil of hyphenated-identity eager to be pulled back.

“**Fragments as Bracelets**” would have touched upon the way we wear and perform our lives, fractured though we may feel, to find meaning. Is experience visible? Can it be shown and demonstrated? *Marrow* dares not answer these questions but instead poses them through the lens of an Armenian proverb uttered by her grandfather: “*knowledge is an invisible/ gold bracelet on your wrist.*” Knowledge of the self, knowledge of history, knowledge that outlasts a single life... *Marrow* acknowledges our inheritance as Armenians, cradled like a newborn your *tantig* is absolutely dying to hold, as sacred as the food lovingly crafted in our kitchens and hearths.

“**Diaspora Dreams**” highlights the title of a poem which would have magnified Celeste’s distance from Armenia, the way that the overwhelming hope of our forebears is one many of us feel too ashamed to realize. *Marrow* alleviates pressure faced by diasporan peoples and examines identity as an amorphous process, a phantasm that promises and plays within the intangible desires we each hold dear in our hearts, a dance that always faces our homeland regardless of geographic proximity. It says ‘don’t fear that which beats with the world and its antiquities.’ “**Stones Hold Memory,**” “**Flatbread and Tears,**” and “**A Long Conversation**” each contended to take the primary heading in this book review, and each verse held in their letters a deep analysis of history, food, and culture — principle themes that permeate Celeste’s collection...

In the end, I chose “**Dark Frescoes**” from her poem “*Your Stones Wait/ —at Geghard Monastery*” because of the two concluding stanzas those words are nestled within:

I dance ever so slowly
light pours through arches
remnants of **dark frescoes**
/
A force moves my spirit
limbs reach into the invisible.

Here, *Marrow*’s thesis comes to life: outward expression manifest as a force of light against a deep history, illuminating the invisible slag — desire, memory, and reconciliation — that floats within the space of our identity and being (sometimes without our permission). We all have frescoes on our inner arches, entrenched in darkness, aching for light. We all exist dichotomously, in-between, and in the “poetics of parts” we’re allowed to embrace the difficulties within ourselves to better bind us to the timeline that came before and will exist well after... our ancestors, our contemporaries, and our descendants all. Therein lies *Marrow*’s ‘victory’ — it is a testament long in the making, an acceptance of all that life brings on, blooming as the dream of those that came before us and making real an edifice upon which the contemporary Armenian-Human (magnify that hyphen) may stand.

In one of my favorite poems of the collection, “Seaweed Torment,” Celeste Nazeli Snowber asks “Could art alone heal?”... and the answer to that question is complex in the same way geopolitical tensions in the Caucasus remain complex in the 21st century. Art *may* seem toothless alone, but as *part* of a greater awareness and agreement with the self, it *may* just mend wounds we accumulate in the process of life. It may look forward to a new generation and a future paved by the light step of our contemporary song and dance. *The Marrow of Longing* was composed as a long letter to Celeste’s late mother Grace, who occupies the primary dedication and smiles upon each page, but in being so transparent inspires its reader to bear themselves and accept the healing light of poetry upon their own dark frescoes and to make music their hidden sighs.



Armine Jahrahyan



These photos were taken at Malatia market in Yerevan.

Armine Jarahyan was born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, and moved to L.A. in 2014. She is an actress at Hamazkayin Theatre Company in Glendale and she photographs people wearing Armenian Traditional Garments. But most importantly she is the mom of Areg and Arevik.



CILICIA

Seroun Mouradian

My ancestors were forced out of their homes
From the west they marched east
Until the west existed no more
I imagine what they looked like
By comparing them to the shadows found in the faces of their offspring today
I reconstruct their sharp noses & almond eyes
Their wide cheeks & high cheekbones
Their tight curls & half smiles
I try to make them come back to life
But like the west, they fade from view
Now, whenever I meet their great grandchildren, often in a distant land
I am also looking into the faces of those who were stolen
The 1.5 million nameless family members
The faceless race made in the likeness of God
With his anointing around their necks
Which the enemy couldn't stand the sight of
When I see my ancestor's offspring,
I see how desperately the evil ones tried to snuff out the light emanating from this stubborn race
In their offspring, I see a quiet determination to continue on
In their offspring, I search for the ones who exist only in memory

ON THE ROAD TO ARTSAKH—A SOLDIER'S CONVERSATION

On the road to Artsakh—A soldier's conversation

I said goodbye to my mother

To fight for my homeland

Where I'm headed

There's a crack in the red, blue and orange

She threw water after me

And said, "God be with you, my son"

I think God will be there on the battlefield

I'm beginning to feel the weight of my family's faces disappearing into the horizon as I turn around to catch one last glance

This might be the last time I get the chance to remember her words

And I feel God is walking side by side with me

Closer than the battlefield

My comrades are telling me stories of their girlfriends waiting for them back home

They have plans to get married and start a family of their own

I realize we're all no more than 18, 19, 20 years old

They're updating me on the body counts, the enemy is gaining ground

It's then I believe God's hands on me

It feels comforting like a heavy blanket in a snowy Yerevan

Finally, we arrive to Artsakh

There are rockets flying overhead, and hate filled eyes up ahead

I see broken Khachkars on the ground

An orange sunset and red pomegranate trees

I take my position to defend my people as I raise my sniper

I envision the elderly in bunkers, the empty kindergarten school yard and my home filled with the smell of Soorj and Apricots

My people have been here before

AGHOTK

Yes ghashtvim Im artsunknerov
Amen irigun gtaghvim
Ku luys Im achkis mech gorsevav
Kezi Gernages chem gernar nedel
Amen ardu nor gdzenim
Ko seret havadarim e
Martu tasagark e
Gerta guka
Payrs ku seret Yergayr dariner gtimana

translation:

I must come to terms with my tears
As each night I am buried,
Your light has been lost in my eyes
Therefore, I can't leave you behind (show indifference),
Each morning I am born anew
For your love is faithful

Seroun Mouradian was born in San Francisco, CA in 1993 and likes to think of herself as a lover and mischief-maker. She began writing poems in the 3rd grade in what was an extracurricular activity. Little did she know that poetry would be a way to connect with the world and that the city she grew up in would support her creative side. Through her words she hopes to bring you along on this magical, yet, emotional journey. She believes that by sharing her world through words, both Armenians and non-Armenians alike will be able to see that most experiences are universal, and it will encourage people to be kind. You can see more of her work on Instagram @written_alchemy.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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

*David Kherdian was born in Racine, Wisconsin, the site of his 13-volume Root River Cycle. In addition to his poetry, biographies, novels, and memoirs, his translations and retellings have included the Asian classic *Monkey: A Journey to the West*, and the soon to be released 9th century Armenian bardic epic, *David of Sassoun*. He has also written a narrative life of *The Buddha*. As an editor he has produced two seminal anthologies: *Settling America: The Ethnic Expression of 14 Contemporary American Poets*, and *Down at the Santa Fe Depot: 20 Fresno Poets*, which inspired over 100 city and state anthologies. His biography of his mother, *The Road From Home*, his best known work, has been continuously in print in various editions and 17 translations, since its publication in 1979. An hour-long documentary on his poetry, by New York independent filmmaker Jim Belleau, was released in 1997. He is married to two-time Caldecott Award winner, Nonny Hogrogian, with whom he has collaborated on a number of children's books, and also on three journals, *Ararat*, *Forkroads: A Journal of Ethnic-American Literature*, and *Stopinder: A Gurdjieff Journal for Our Time*.*

Zepure is a queer, interdisciplinary artist from Yerevan. They often draw inspiration from dreams, touching on issues of identity. @flatdimensions on IG.

John is a diasporan digging into his cultural identity. He has been working on a fantasy novel woven with Armenian mythology. @liminal_armenian on IG.

Holly Malkasian was raised in a suburb of Boston and currently lives in a suburb of New York City. She is an editor for an online wine/spirits magazine and teaches French. Her writing has been published in The Abstract Elephant, The Sad Girls Literary Club, Little Old Lady Comedy, amongst other publications. In her spare time, she enjoys being with her family, reading, or working on her evolving golf game. Holly feels a strong connection to her heritage and likes to promote all things Armenian, especially to her two sons.

Arman Ghaloosian was born and raised in Oakville, Canada. He is currently at the University of Toronto pursuing a graduate degree in Russian and European Affairs.

Sebastian Sarkisian is a Kikilian-Armenian who puts rhymes on paper. Inheritor of a rich ancient Christian tradition he estranged himself from it in naivete in favor of secularism. His search for truth ultimately brought him back and now he tries to illustrate what he wished he knew before his embrace of prodigality. He is currently living in Los Angeles studying nutrition and hoping to publish his first book Dark Blue at Hottest Hue.