

9th

The remaining window in the living room rattled
the first time Father played Beethoven's Ninth.

In Beirut, bombs shattered glass panels, and fathers
taped plastic sheets on every splintered pane.

I didn't hear the guttural bang of the timpani.
Clashing cymbals didn't symbolize the fiery

arrows of Ares. Low flying jets coined that claim.
I didn't care for the bombastic choir; they drowned

the rat-a-tat-tat of M16s. I sifted through the noise
like a deaf beggar sifting through trash

and discovering fleshy pomegranate. That's how
I discovered the French horns, so lonely and lost,

buried deep in Beethoven's Ninth.

- 2017 Editors' Prize from MARY: A Journal of New Writing

I Didn't Want Mama to Kiss Me Anymore

Every morning, she drove me to school
in Father's Chevrolet. The radio spewed static.

She parked crooked by the curb and allowed
the engine to idle so it won't die. The heavy

metal clique against the no parking wall
smoked cigarettes. Mama with her maroon

lipstick reached over and kissed me
underneath the twisted sycamore. I rubbed

my face and prayed Sylvia, the girl I loved
since seventh grade, never saw this. Once,

during English period, Mrs. Reyna, read
my poem to the class: When you turn

seventeen, cram Mama in a box, duct tape
the lids quickly, so she'll never come out.

- *Silver Birch Press*, January 2017

Inner City with Father

In our last conversation, he sat
on a milk crate, held the unlit

cigarette like a fountain pen,
and kept tapping the filter against

his weak heart. As if he wanted
to offer a final walkthrough

inside his chambers, dispose
the melted snow of Mt. Ararat,

wrap the warped *Kamancheh* of Sayat
Nova in rags, tuck Mama's grape

leaves like love letters in the left
ventricle. Beethoven blocked

a coronary and a cadenza full
of sonnets pushed against his aorta.

*That's the ashen smoke of Beirut.
That's the bloated bridge of Bourj,*

*and that's you, he said,
my failing tourniquet.*

- *Lunch Ticket, 2017* | Nominated for the Pushcart Prize & for the 2017 Best of the Net Anthology.

Make Allah Your Lavender

We lay down on the rooftop garden
before the afternoon drizzle. Sprigs
of sage slithered into our sandals.

A pebble struck a fatalii pepper
next to my ear. I knew it's the boy
with the slingshot. His mother drew

the curtains when she noticed the bed
of spearmint crush under our weight.
Raindrops caused the wayward

butterfly on your torso to quiver.
The graffiti on the alabaster vase,
Make Allah your lavender, dissolved

like the faint tattoo on your chin.
A cement truck backfired,
then a lightning scarred the sky,

then a thunder, then a bomb blast
near the bakery. You covered your breasts
with the burqa. *That's God coughing*,

you whispered, *in shame*.

- *Hobo Camp Review*, April 2018

Biology 1A

Dear Miss Saccoman, you made me
sit in the backroom next to the skeleton
because I distracted freckled Margie,

the albino football player with specs,
and you. Your cluttered periodic table
or the video on the mitosis of onion root

drove me near suicide. I screamed
in anger, "I don't want to be a scientist
when I grow up!" You nodded and erased

the blackboard full of evolution.
Dust fell. "I want to become a writer,"
I said. You nodded and led me

to the back, to the toothless skeleton,
smiled, sharpened my shriveled pencil,
and asked me to write.

- The Metonym, *Uninhibited* thematic edition in 2015
- Altadena Poetry Review | Anthology 2015