Inner City With Father

Shahé Mankerian

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.

Shahé Mankerian is the principal of St. Gregory Hovsepian School in Pasadena and the director of mentorship at the International Armenian Literary Alliance (IALA). He has been the co-director of the Los Angeles Writing Project, and a recipient of the Los Angeles Music Center's BRAVO Award, which recognizes teachers for innovation in arts education. In 2021, Mankerian's inaugural poetry collection, *History of Forgetfulness,* was published by Fly on the Wall Press in the UK. The collection was a semifinalist for the prestigious Khayrallah Prize, and a finalist at the Bibby First Book Competition, the Crab Orchard Poetry Open Competition, the Quercus Review Press Poetry Book Award, and the White Pine Press Poetry Prize.

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