

2021 LITERARY

Newsboy

You are looking at the camera-
eyes steady under your
tweed cap,
knickered legs spread wide,
an adolescent Colossus
astride the corner of Fifth
and Flower
in downtown L.A.

It is 1917; Lafayette knows
we're "Over There."
The sheaf of papers
under your arm
tells of battles and the
truncated lives
of men, boys
scarcely older than you.
Too young for this war
you will be too old for the next.

On your right hip
a smart leather money satchel.
These are hard times
and you pay the beat cop
to protect you from street gangs.
But that won't protect you
from the cop's bullying demands
for more,
so your mother will come
and take what you've earned
before you run out of this
edition.

Your choirboy smile
belies your street-smarts,
that you are a third-grade
dropout,
a truant whose earnings add
to his family's coffers.

I, your omniscient daughter,
know you will soon go
to a small desert town
you've never heard of
and in a language
you do not know
become a merchant
of boots and blue jeans.

You will marry and take
your bride to live in that place
which she will begin to hate.
But what is that to me?
I am your youngest child
impatient to be born,
greedy and eager to have
that smile for me alone.

— Marilyn Wallner



When lightning strikes upon the rainbow

There are moments when the storm clouds
return to engulf me in its maelstrom,
the uncertainty and its fears like a sinister fog
shroud the light that at one time guided me through opaqueness
of the cave and its tunnels that from right to left
bounced like a ball off the field of life,
I turn my sight not knowing if I'm coming or going,
feeling that my steps have already left their tracks
along the path that my borrowed optimism
recognizes from the instinct that for years guided me.

Remembering my beloved, my soulmate, Carolina Mancuso

—David Rodgers



Quando el relámpago pega sobre el arcoíris

Hay momentos en que las nubes de la tempestad
vuelven a envolverme en su remolino,
la incertidumbre y sus miedos como niebla tenebrosa
ocultan la luz que en un tiempo fue mi guía dentro lo opaco
de la cueva y sus túneles que a diestra y siniestra
rebotaba como pelota fuera de la cancha de la vida,
giro mi mirada sin saber si voy o vengo,
sintiendo que mis pasos ya han dejado sus huellas
por la vereda que mi optimismo prestado
reconoce por el instinto que por años me guió.

Recordando a mi amada compañera del alma, Carolina Mancuso

—David Rodgers

O F R E N D A S

Elvira Elva Montemayor - PRESENTE!



It seems
That we were just on the phone
Before suddenly you were gone.
On our daily talks
Somehow I could see your face
Your smile
Sense your childlike happiness
I can't bear to erase your number
from my phone.

I wish I had told you more often
That you are the reason
I am who I am today.
You didn't finish high school
You became the daycare our mother
Could not afford
You fed our younger sister and me
Took our little hands
As you walked us to school
You brought us balloons and popcorn
On Friday nights
Made us smile and be hopeful
For a moment erase our poverty
I can't bear to erase your number
from my phone.

Quien va cuidar a Elva, hija?
Our mother said to me
Just days before she transitioned.
I assured her I would.
I pray I did enough.
I was with you
As you tried to overcome the traumas
Of a father's abandonment
As you almost left us twice before
As you survived COVID
In a virus-ridden nursing home
I can't bear to erase your number
from my phone.

Somehow we never really did this
In our childhood days
Never really said three simple words
I became determined to say to you
When mom passed away.
They became the words
Which now ended all of our calls.
The last words I said to you
Were not hesitantly uttered
Very comfortably I simply said
I love you.
I will never erase your number
from my phone

—Laura Rendón, her sister

Ofrenda a mi amigo Arturo Olivas

I was not expecting the news today.
I knew you were fighting hard, but still...
I was not expecting the news today.

So, now you join the pantheon of past friends
Now friends
Forever friends
Gone friends
Who knows?

I remember when we were young,
I remember you,
I remember us,
I remember
That is all I can do.

Rest, peacefully, amigo
I will remain here, for now, unsettled.

—Dennis Medina



Art: Liliana Wilson

Midnight's Milky Way

It is dark of night that lets us
see our galactic light.
It takes the depths of sorrow
to enrich the heights of joy.
It is the cruelty of injustice
that drives our hunger for liberation.

What can we call this polarity in conflict?
And what can we do once we name it?
A dilemma:

To grab by its horns
and wrestle it into our becoming.
We call it life.

Tom Keene and Muse
www.tomkeenesmuse.com