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TEXT poetry

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3 poems

On the Shores of Miraflores

with my belly full of stale
bread and overpriced rosa náutica
I do not think of love

as I watch young drunk locals hold
hands through an afternoon malaise
I would not write of love

while they walk their dogs, kiss
and butcher poetry beneath olive trees
I should not speak for love

as they skim stones over black waves
then plunge like cormorants into sea
I cannot dive into love

with my feet bare, crushing
rotten crab bones into concrete
I could never walk with love

when condors circle clifftops, slice
through paraglider's laughing screams
who could ever dream of love?

I pelt a pebble at the same ocean
that stole and swallowed you whole
I write only of you.

Shallow Bathers

We watch the giant pod
of local surfers paddle out
as I press pen to paper

They swim into deep water, shift
through shallow bathers like jellyfish
while I write of their blonde hair

The pod melts like icy poles
as we shield our eyes. I turn
their tan bodies into similes

They form a surfer's circle, link
arms. When they splash water high
I notice I am dry head to toe

They could carve each swell
with ease while I never learnt how
to stand on a board. I ask a nearby

local what they're doing. He peers
at my frantic pen and notebook
mutilated by scribbles. He says

a girl took her life last week
I cap my pen, close pages, melt
into the sand at his feet.

Fleshing Out

She's saved these yellow pieces
fragile and creased, that paddle
right back there with a skim read

We trace decades with a finger
cut from an oyster shell, hooked
inside his mouth like guilt

Mum and I pull him
from these scraps. I neglect
to ask her why she's saved

them all this time. She couldn't
have been holding onto these
clippings for me or my sister

Did she hoard them for herself?
Was she going to write about him
first? We dig our arms in down

to our elbows. Sea lice bite
at the webbing between our fingers
as we twist truth like a scaling knife

through gills. I hold back from asking
why she kept him buried here
beneath winter clothes and mothballs

It only matters that we flesh out
these words before they fade like scales
on a deep sea fish pulled up too fast.

Sean West holds a BFA in Creative and Professional Writing. In 2019, he was shortlisted for the Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. His work has been published or is forthcoming in StylusLit, Stilts Journal, and Baby Teeth Journal. www.callmemariah.com.