FLASH FICTION

My Father at the Border between Hades and La Merica

by Edvige Giunta



"Snow Dreams. Young Woman." by Irina Novikova

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I met my father, diagnosed with a *malattia innominata,* at the border between Hades and La Merica. On his back he carried a burlap sack of half-told stories, other people's secrets, his children's sorrows, letters from his *fidanzata*, shredded by his mother, scraps of an Easter chocolate egg circa 1954, a pack of Muratti, half empty.

I stared at his hunched shape with my one remaining limp eye, then my left arm filled the gap between us, and I stole the white and red pack from the sack. I tapped the bottom, a slight tap, like burping a baby, then slid a cigarette out with surprisingly deft fingers. I offered him one and gestured to cross, sack and all, and he did, and I followed, and we inhaled, exhaled, inhaled, exhaled.

Innominata: In Italian, unnamed, an old-fashioned term, also an allusion to L'Innominato, a mysterious and powerful character in *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) by Alessandro Manzoni. This nineteenth-century novel played a key role in Italian school curriculums for generations, so much so that its plot and characters, including L'Innominato, became part of the jargon of the young and the old.

Fidanzata: Italian for fiancée, a more formal term than girlfriend. It indicates that a couple is engaged to be married.

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