

BRANDON MARLON

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## Aleppo

Smoke eddies above the clamor  
of barrel bombs and ground fires  
ravaging historic bazaars and inns  
once the haunt of famed rulers.  
Scurrying residents, half-starved,  
withhold breath for fear of chlorine gas.

Caked in dust, a bloodied toddler  
with shrapnel in his talus hobbles  
from rubble, tiptoeing past glass shards,  
toward shelter in the ribbed shadows  
of charred and pockmarked tenements,  
concrete skeletons suspended in death.

Screaming women slap themselves  
and trouble Allah with urgent whys  
as smoldering embers  
are nudged under drooping awnings  
and collapsed high-rises obscure  
an ancient citadel bereft of inheritors.

The battle-scarred stealthily creep  
from burnt-out wreckage  
in time to spot an alarmed  
orange cat with white stripes  
pawing the carcass of an elderly man  
lying on his cane, face down in mud.

Beyond the porous city limits,  
threadbare convoys snake  
into grudging neighbor states  
whose tent cities weekly swell,  
their traumatized denizens  
inert in the tedium of limbo.

In First World living-rooms  
and international airport lounges,  
riveted viewers gasp with creased brows  
in utter disbelief,  
consumed by sheer dread,  
wondering of the feline's fate.

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**BRANDON MARLON** is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize in Poetry (Fall 2015), and his writing has been published in 180+ publications in 25 countries. [www.brandonmarlon.com](http://www.brandonmarlon.com).