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Firepool

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I've studied Shakespeare and read Hemingway. I've marveled at Poe and Hawthorne, Pynchon and Roth, Murakami and King, too. Philip Levine taught me the simple truth, and Pablo Neruda showed me love and despair. Rabindranath Tagore breathed light into my body, and Juan Felipe Herrera turned me on my cabeza. Bukowski? He just punched me in the gut.

Let's not forget the ladies: Dickinson and Harper Lee, Atwood and Hinton, Zadie Smith and J.K. Rowling, and cold Ayn Rand, who saw the world for what it was and shrugged.

These writers, thinkers, people— some alive, some dead, their words all live and speak. They speak to you and speak to me, indiscriminately.

What they told me was this: You needed me.

It was over bitter black coffee on Wurzbach, staring down traffic watching an Indian woman cross the street and a Hispanic guy take slow drags on his cigarette, that I realized I've got to do this my way. My way and no other way.

Because one day, I'll be dead, and then you'll wish I would've done a little less reading and a lot more writing. Because you needed me.

It's not easy, this thing called writing. It's a firepool; it dares you to jump right in with the promise of nothing, with the possibility that it'll roast you alive inside and out until you're scarred so bad not even momma can recognize you.

It promises nothing, but the thing is, you needed me. You called me.

So I've already jumped in. I've already been scorched and burned. I've consumed the flames and now, I'm spitting them at you.

Now, like a mighty Tolkien dragon, I will scorch every last one of you until my fire soul extinguishes, until the earth and all of its lovely people scream for release and cry and beg for sweet mercy, because in the end, you needed me.

You need me.

San Antonian Alex Z. Salinas earned a bachelor's degree in political science from St. Mary's University in 2011. His flash fiction has appeared online in Every Day Fiction, Nanoism, escarp, 101 Words, 101 Fiction, and ZeroFlash. He has also had poetry published in the San Antonio Express-News.