

Miriam O'Neal

Kovno Ghetto, April 1942, Portrait Before Shabbat

Smoke is difficult,
its shapes amorphous
and un-durable. Ash
is more predictable,
able to hurl itself into a place and stay there.

With the wind's help
it will sift its way down
to melt and stain the pocked ice
or shrivel on the wet Spring grass
or land on some edge fine as a blade
against the neck
just below the jawline.

She has watched the elders pull their beards
taut in contemplation, as if the sun, by rising,
had licked the morning clean—and the mud
that shone between the rows of cabbages
were the glow of Jerusalem.
Her pentimento mingles shame
with resistance—

And who will walk into the holy city?

This poem by Miriam O'Neal will be included in her collection, *We Start With What We're Given*, which will be published in July, 2018, by Kelsay Press. O'Neal earned her MFA in Literature and Writing from Bennington College. Her poems and reviews have appeared in many journals, including AGNI, Blackbird Journal, Ragazine, and Southern Poetry Review, among others. She says, "I do believe that poetry changes us. If we read Auden's elegy in to Yeats in its entirety, we find that the change often happens further down the river than we can see: 'it survives,/ A way of happening, a mouth' This is why I write."