

Senior Division, Nonfiction

Colleen Soulliere, Harbour Grace

**Second-Hand Smoking in Lisbon (an excerpt)**

Years before, Agnes Walsh and I were both at the same dinner party. I was completely off-balance in her presence. The whole meal, I kept looking around the table thinking, how are we all eating so easily, talking about the things you talk about at dinner parties? How is everyone so calm? Doesn't anyone else understand we are sitting here with Agnes Walsh? Eventually, I told her how awestruck I felt, to be sitting at a table with Agnes Walsh. I wish I could remember what she said to me, but I was drunk, and that was a lot of years ago now.

I carried her poems all over Lisbon. They were with me in Barrio Alto where everyone smelled of high-end perfume and expensive cigarettes. Her poems waited in line in Belem, first to be admitted to the Mosteiro Jeronimos, then to purchase a pasteis de nata. They were at my feet in public parks, where we sat in the outdoor cafes and kiosks sipping duplos or red wine or mojitos. I carried them to all the castles in Sintra. Twice, I took her poems by train to Cascais where I waded in inconceivably warm surf of the Atlantic Ocean.

I never read the poems in Portugal. I never even took them out for a photo.