



★ **the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life**

**Alcy Leyva**

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In Alcy Leyva's novel *the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life*, sixteen-year-old Maji's New York world is falling apart, and he sets out to sea in search of a miracle. The book is miraculous in its own right, featuring lyrical prose and a kind of dreamlike logic that make Maji's journey a memorable one.

The struggles Maji faces hit every aspect of his life in the Bronx. His parents' relationship seems to be in jeopardy, and his own bond with his police officer father has grown strained without a clear reason. Maji and his peers are well aware of the violence that young Black Americans face, with videos of police brutality and killings being a regular part of their lives. As he loses some of the few reliable figures in his life and neither school nor home feels secure any longer, Maji turns to his remaining source of inspiration—*Moby Dick*, which he has yet to finish. He builds a raft and heads toward the Atlantic, looking for something meaningful.

That ocean voyage draws inspiration from, and sometimes parallels, Maji's chosen text, with the search for his own metaphorical white whale incorporating elements of other classic tales of heroes on a quest. At points, Maji finds "just more of his life back home: threats upon his life, fighting for survival; the lifeless eyes of predators on his black skin." His resourcefulness and his limited resources are both challenged in myriad ways, and the book captures his shifting mental state well as the line between reality and escapism blurs and his decisions invite ever more danger.

*the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life* is both an engrossing adventure story and a meditation on the struggles of coming of age in a turbulent time.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2023)

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