

## PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT — Nicole Opara

Project Title: *LIMBS*

Genre: Literary Psychological Thriller

During my residency at *Can Serrat*, I developed my fourth novel, *LIMBS*, a literary psychological thriller set in 1970s Indiana. The novel follows an immigrant family who begin receiving anonymous instructions promising financial reward in exchange for increasingly morally corrupt acts. What begins as small betrayals escalates into devastating consequences, as each family member sacrifices someone they love for the promise of a \$10 million inheritance—one that may not exist at all. As the family fractures, only one character ultimately refuses to participate, forcing the novel to interrogate whether survival lies in obedience, sacrifice, or refusal.

*LIMBS* explores themes of greed, generational trauma, moral compromise, faith, and agency. Structurally, the novel is organised around twelve moral “tests,” each aligned with a different part of the human body. This framework shapes both the narrative architecture and the psychological descent of the characters, allowing the book to experiment with nonlinear timelines, shifting points of view, and subtle speculative undertones.

Stylistically, the work draws on cinematic tension and mythic fatalism, blending psychological realism with symbolic structure. While the premise is high-concept, the emotional core remains intimate: the erosion of family bonds under pressure, and the cost of inherited fear.

Although I have completed three previous full-length manuscripts (*Darkly, Through the Glass*, *Daisy Chain*, and *A Far Cry From a Lullaby*), *LIMBS* has been my most ambitious and demanding project to date. During the residency, I focused on deep structural development, thematic coherence, and drafting the manuscript to completion. The time and space provided by *Can Serrat* were instrumental in allowing me to sustain creative momentum and bring the project to its current form.

Warmly,

Nicole Opara

## Chapter One

### Lafayette, 1975

5:30 a.m.

*“Already?”*

The alarm detonated through the room. Álvaro didn’t flinch. Head bobbed and weaved restlessly under the sheets. He released the grip from the pillows as he tried to silence it—arm with a mind of its own, flailing before he caught up to it. He pressed it once. Then again. He growled as he flung it across the room. It hit the wall and flatlined.

He rose from his bed but didn’t yawn. Drool dangled from the corner of his mouth. He wiped his face and brushed his hand through his thick dark hair. He lit up a morning cigarette like routine. He perched at the bed’s edge, flipping through dog-eared rejection letters. Smoke curled through the air, fogging up his glasses.

*“This. Cannot. Be my life.”*

He said faintly before hovering toward the curtains—glaring through the dusty blinds of a dimly lit sky. He sighed, then got down on both knees by the bed. He drew from the last of the cigarette before discarding it.

*“God, it’s been two years, man. I need you to pull some strings. Just this once. Amen.”*

He freshened up—slicked back his hair and put on a borrowed suit, tucking in pesky tags. He grabbed his things and headed out the door. Owls hooted tirelessly from a snapped branch—watching him as he paced a few blocks toward a bus stop where a disheveled-looking man was sleeping underneath it. He circled him curiously until the man grunted—snorting back to life. Before he could say anything, the bus came.

“Morning. I need a return ticket from Lafayette to Bloomington.”

The driver squinted toward the man sleeping at the bus stop, then back at him. “Fifty cents, kid.”

“Cool.”

He stammered before he asked, “Actually... get him one too.” Álvaro remarked as he beckoned the man over. His lips parted. He grabbed his dampened cardboard and black plastic bags. He slung them over his shoulder and limped onto the bus.

“God bless you,” he whispered.

As they entered the bus, Álvaro took to a window seat—eyes fixating on a large spider by the window ledge. Its legs twitched under fluorescent lighting and jolted with every sudden movement. He blew at it, then knocked on the glass rhythmically to seal its attention.

**8:30 a.m.**

Passengers groaned at the sudden downpour, misguided by a three-day strain of a muggy heatwave nobody saw coming.

Álvaro pressed the buzzer as he finally arrived in Bloomington. Once he got off the bus, he ducked as if the rain could be outrun—if he could only run a little faster. He crossed two roads, tapping his leg, jaw tightening as he whispered, “*C’món, c’món, c’món.*”

At each stalling traffic light, loafers and socks soaked with every stride as he hopped over puddles—nearly knocking over a preschooler.

He reached the main entrance of a tall building. He reached into his bag for the interview letter and wiped his glasses against his trousers, swallowing hard as he entered through revolving doors—shoes squeaking toward the reception desk.

Before he could utter a word, he was greeted with a tender smile and a soft voice calling, “*Mr. Álvaro Cruz?*”

“*Mhm! Yeah. Me.*” He said shakily as he tried to control his panting.

The concierge looked down at her clipboard and asked him to sign loose paperwork before telling him to take a seat.

“Mr. Bartlett will call you in shortly. You’re nice and early too,” she reassured him with a knowing smile.

“I can’t take all the credit. The bus came right on time.”

She leaned in, studying his shifting gaze. “May I offer you something to drink? *Tea? Coffee?*”

“Coffee works,” Álvaro cut in with a crooked smile.

“Of course. I won’t be a minute,” she said, heels clicking toward the coffee machine. She bent over.

Álvaro sat down and watched her closely. He shifted around as the tags on his suit scratched at his neck and waistband, prodding him from the inside out.

He adjusted his dampened tie as she approached him.

“There you go. It’s piping hot, so be careful,” she uttered, smile widening.

“Thank you,” he remarked warmly, eyes still locked on hers. He watched her walk away, smiling absentmindedly.