

curios

2016



Coconino
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CURIOS

Our intent for *Curios* literary magazine is to foster the breadth of creative expressions across our northern Arizona community by providing publication opportunities to local writers and artists. *Curios* is produced annually by Coconino Community College students enrolled in COM 181 with the guidance of CCC faculty and staff.

For Submission Guidelines and Charitable Contributions, Please visit us at: curios.coconino.edu

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Curios

MAGAZINE

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Girl With Green Eyes

CHARLIE BYNAR



After Issa

JAMES JAY



The bees are lost
in the orange layered crown
of the poppy
sprung wildly
in my front lawn—

Bees, fly fully in your frantic
curves of joy,
for I have no design
for firing up
the rusting lawn mower.

Like a breeze falling
down the slopes
of Mount Humphreys,
may the gods of our
universes tend

to their jobs
gently, if they must at all—

A Broken Jug

LARRY HENDRICKS



Yesterday, I was standing outside the TA truck stop in Kingman at the 93 turnoff to Vegas. Sun out, sky blue, desert heat building but still comfortable after I'd been in an air-conditioned car for two hours. My co-workers were inside ordering a breakfast to go. I stood there people watching to pass the time, anxious to get back on the road so we would make it to our conference on time. There was an old woman – matted blond hair, puffy, red face, dirty clothes – pushing a baby stroller. Two Chihuahuas sat in the baby stroller, happy, quietly flitting their heads around like birds at the people passing them. The woman was either talking to herself, or she was talking to the dogs, or both. I don't know. She dropped a gallon jug of water she was carrying in one hand while pushing the stroller. She bent over to pick it up, and the plastic jug had cracked and was no good anymore. The look on her face was one of “just my luck.” You know that look? Anyway, she took a couple of swallows from the crack in the jug and got water all over the front of her shirt. After she had her fill, she put some in her hand and held her hand out to the little dogs. They lapped at her hand, and she refilled a couple of times for them before she stuffed the jug in a trash can. She pushed the baby stroller over to a picnic table and sat down.

I had some loose change in my pocket. I hate loose change in my pocket (don't like the weight, or the sound, or something, I don't know), so I decided to give it to her to give her some cash to buy another jug of water. I grabbed a couple of one-dollar bills from my wallet, too, and then shuffled over to her. She looked up at me, gave me the cautious glare. Eyes bleary. She smelled of booze. The little dogs were interested in my approach and stood up in the baby stroller, tails wagging.

“For your dogs,” I said, and held out the money.

“Thank you,” she said, and let me put the money in her dirty open palm. Her smile warmed her face.

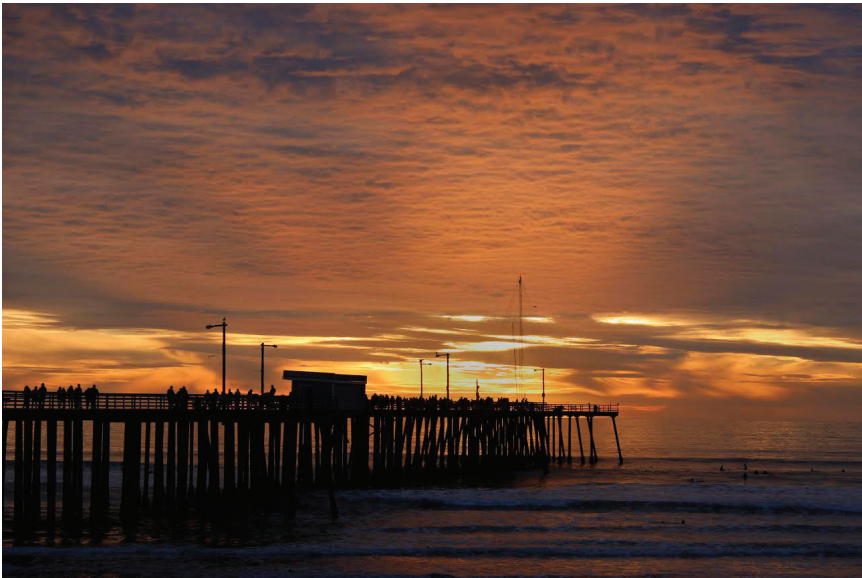
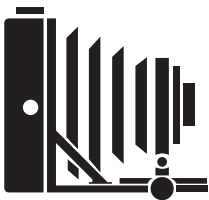
I walked away and felt good about what I'd done.

About 30 seconds later, a guy came out of the truck stop. He looked Hispanic and had gray, curly hair. I noticed dusty cowboy boots and jeans, with a dirty white T-shirt. A messy beard and mustache hid the bottom half of his face. The rest was tanned and leathered from lots of hard time in the sun. He carried a plastic bag with two Tall Boy Budweisers. He gave me a hard look of “don’t mess with me,” then went and sat down next to the woman. He handed her one of the Tall Boys and petted the two dogs in the baby stroller, smiling.

She gave him the money I had given her.

Sunset & Under the Pier

RYAN ADAMS



Paint

SARAH ADAMS



i just want to be smoke.
rise
up and up and up and
watch
you try to catch me.
bat at me like the butterflies
you once captured.

i slip in between your finger tips
grin while you frown
i want
to be the smoke you blow to make rings.
guess at the shapes i make
i will be that careless cloud.

the night is under your skin.
i smell it in your breath, hear it from your whispers, see it in your hair.

you bleed moon and i am the moth you attract.

know that,
it is okay to finger paint the sunset,
as long as you share the moment with me.
we will drive by with our hands out the windows
playing in the
periwinkles, magentas, oranges
it slips through our fingers the way i slip through you.

so let us speed a little faster
my foot on the gas pedal our hands out the windows
knowing that i am Smoke and you are Night
and together
we just painted the sky.

Midnight in Flagstaff



KERRY BENNETT

Lights out, windows open.
The unease of being here
(without really being here)
hangs in the air.
I taste the cool summer breeze,
smell pine needles and dust.
The midnight train comes through town,
and my thoughts rattle around like empty boxcars.
Sleep settles softly, finally,
As crickets chirp in the field beyond.

Looking East from Heckethorn Road

JESSE SENSIBAR

I get up at early dawn to watch the few fleeting moments of monsoon clouds when their undersides turn pink and then orange in the rising sun. I look up and they are already gray tinged with edges of cracked white clear-coat like the beat-up Fender Stratocaster in the hands of a man sitting alone on a bar stool in the middle of a boot-worn wooden dance floor in that single level Texas roadhouse just West of the Brownsville line.

Jack

CHARLIE BYNAR





You think you're on a road you know really well, but then something takes a turn and you are lost, as lost as you've ever been.

You glare at the old guy at the front of the room. He's got a bald head and a full, white beard. He's staring at you, and he's smiling. No guile or meanness in his eyes. Still, you're pissed he's noticed you.

"How about it, friend?" he asks.

The room smells of coffee and burnt dust from the space heaters. Your forehead sweats. Your legs and hands won't stop shaking. You really want a drink. All the other people in the room look at you, and your face gets hot. You have an urge to piss, again. The old guy at the front of the room waits. They all wait. With horror, you find yourself opening your mouth to speak.

"My name is Dylan, and I'm an alcoholic," you say and hate that your voice sounds fearful.

"Dylan, welcome. Hi, Dylan. Glad you're here," they all say in unison in various ways.

You take a deep breath and let it out slow to bring down the rabbit ticks of your heart.

"I used to always think I had a handle on the booze," you say. "But after last night, I reckon I don't."
You pull out your phone and put in your pass code.

"I remember going to the bar after work," you say. "It was a bad day. Most days are. So, I was looking forward to a few beers."

You press the camera app on your phone and scroll through the recent pictures.

"I remember thinking it would be a good idea to pound shots of bourbon, and I'm pretty sure I sang some sea shanties," you say. "There was an argument in there somewhere, too."

You lightly touch the bruising below your left eye with your left hand. Your right hand finds the picture you're looking for and

you pull it up. You stare at it a few seconds to try to understand what you're looking at.

"I don't remember much else, except coming to this morning to the sound of crows outside my window. I live alone now. Wife and son gone some time ago. They still live here in town."

You stare at the photo for another blink and then pass the phone to the person next to you. She wears white sneakers, and you notice her fingernails are chewed when she takes the phone. You don't look to see her face, her eyes.

"That was on my phone this morning when I looked," you say and watch the phone go around the room from hand to hand. One woman with long, gray hair puts a hand to her mouth. Her T-shirt says, "Let Go and Let God." A guy with a lumberjack beard shakes his head. Eventually, someone hands the phone to the old guy at the front of the room.

"I reckon I have a problem," you say when the old guy looks at you.

The old guy gets up and strolls over to you. He hands the phone to you gently.

"For the life of me, I can't remember putting my .45 to my head to take that picture," you say. "It was loaded when I checked this morning."

The woman who had put her hand to her mouth says, "You're in the right place."

The old guy nods and pats you on the shoulder.

"Millie ain't lyin'," the old guy says, then adds, "You still got it?"

You shake your head.

"Nah," you say. "I sold it at the pawn shop today."

"Probably a good idea," the old guy says and puts out his hand. You shake it with your cold, sweaty palm, but he doesn't seem to mind.

"Name's Buck," the old guy says.

You want to cry, but you don't know how. A guy clears his throat. He says his name is Charles. He's dressed like he's about to go golfing. He starts talking and everybody shifts their attention to him, not you. You're happy for that and put the phone in your jeans pocket.

The road is new, the direction unfamiliar. You lean back and wonder where it's going to take you. You make the decision that you're

never going to delete that picture. You're going to remember your slobbery smile, your hand on the trigger, the glint on the metal of the gun, the hammer cocked.

You're going to remember that.

Piranha

CHARLIE BYNAR



Ring of Salt

KERRY BENNETT



Here in the high desert,
Water is hidden deep within the mountains, precious and scarce.
Only beads of sweat left on my face as I climb up.
Only a trace of tears left as I wish you goodbye.
I've already cried that river.
I've already finished that drink.
Wanting, not having.
Wishing, not getting.
Wandering, not finding.
Those tears are long gone, under the bridge.
London Bridge, Rainbow Bridge.
The Bridge of Sighs.
As the sun sets, I climb down, my shadow leading the way.
The tears and sweat have left their mark,
Like a ring of salt on the rim of an empty glass
And a slice of lime, a broken straw.

Damn Dam Writer's Block



JACKIE BROWN

Words won't come out, I know that they ought.
Yeah - I know I should write something down,
but there are clouds in my brain, so guess what?

I write silly rhymes - I know I'll get caught,
my peers will most assuredly frown.
My brain, I beg it - but nope. I'm beginning to feel distraught!

Stuck behind the dam they call writers block
my words might seem upside round,
still, I suppose it's better, than writing down nothing but squat.

So homonyms, metaphors, nor semblance of plot,
no simile, adverb or noun,
are all tied in a non-lyrical knot.

I try and I try – and try and try, to remember what I was taught,
all the while realizing I'm so tightly wound,
I'll get something down – whatever - even if it all goes to pot!

Still, you can't say I didn't give it a shot.
I do know how bad this may sound.
I decided it best to not be overwrought,
lest the damn dam break and I drown.

Bench Stream

RYAN ADAMS



Listen or (almost) Die

KRISTEN EDGE



I was cocky, and I didn't listen. That's all there is to it.

The trip started off normal enough. My husband Dave, his insane friend Greg, and I decided to go whitewater kayaking down the Gunnison. It was a three-day trip full of stories ranging from the human-eating mosquitoes that swarmed in excess of millions, forcing us to kayak late into the night with beavers getting pissed off and making splashes at us as we went, to my hangry attitude at the end of the trip almost costing me my marriage (not really... but almost). There were good times like when we got to sleep on a little sand cove etched out of the canyon walls, to bad times like when we were kayaking in the dark and every noise I heard was the next big waterfall I would plummet down and subsequently drown from. I would not classify myself as the most courageous human being, but this was my first time whitewater kayaking in my own boat (boat may be a bit of an overstatement for our little 6-foot inflatable pack rafts). The two crazies I took with me had recently been down the Grand Canyon 60 miles in the same inflatable boats during a flood. They told me later that they hadn't known about the aforementioned flood. Yeah, right. After they got back and told me about their stories, I looked on Google and saw a 12-foot raft get folded in two equal halves from the same section they went through at NORMAL water levels, so you can't tell me I would have been "cool" with them going during a flood in their little infant boats. They might as well have been in teacups going down Niagara in my mind.

At the beginning of the Gunnison trip, everything was easy – some class 2s, a couple of class 3s, but nothing too technical. I followed last so I could see what paths they took between the swells and holes, trying to gain a sense of how to know what spots were "Oh, Crap" spots versus the "I will die" spots. I remember feeling pretty good about my

progress. Dave and Greg complimented me on my skill, swelling my ego to an unnatural level, and we continued. A couple more rapids, and we were to No. 6 of 10 for the day. I was paddling like a pro, and didn't even tip when Greg did. Yes. That's right. Crazy Greg tipped, and I didn't, and he is a rafting guide. HA. HA. HA.

We came off a relatively easy rapid with Dave and Greg slowing down to look at the map and decide if we should be scouting anything coming up before we took the plunge. At this point it may be a good idea to add that I had been whitewater rafting once in Costa Rica and had a terrible experience, falling out and bumper-carring my way through a narrow canyon full of rocks before being submersed under a waterfall and then being saved. If it had been a pinball machine instead of my life, I would have won hands down. I eventually blamed my lack of Spanish skills for not understanding when they explained that the river hadn't been rafted in months because it had been class 5-6 (that's big). I also apparently didn't think I was in any danger when we started because I ignored the commands the guide explained. I should have listened for one like, "Hey crazy gringa, you're going to fall because you aren't looking the right way," but I must have missed it.

While Dave and Greg were looking at maps, I decided to become a professional and map my own course through the next rapid. I didn't need them. I was an independent woman! The water and I were one, together. I was wrong.

Getting farther and farther ahead, I heard a rapid coming up that was just around the bend in the canyon. There was a large hole I expertly navigated around and looked back to warn the guys. I was trying to help them out, be a team player. When I looked back and yelled, I noticed they were yelling something back at me. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I figured it wasn't that important. I heard something to my left, a couple of guys with kayaking vests and paddles were walking along the left bank, raising their paddles and cheering me on. "That's weird," I thought to myself. "Why are they out of their boats?"

I came around the corner and therein lay the needle that would

pop my ego faster than you can say “oh shit.” The canyon narrowed down, a huge boulder on my right with the tiniest passage around it, but I couldn’t see the other side. To my left there were a plethora of rocks, eddies, and holes littering the open routes, but I couldn’t decide where to go because before I knew it, I was stuck on something. All of the rapid laid out before me, and I couldn’t move because I was stuck on a rock just beneath the water. I glanced back, which was perfect because that pushed me over the rock, flipping my boat upside down with me still strapped in (we had splash guards that secured us in the boat itself). I didn’t want to be stuck on that stupid rock anyway, but my only thought at that moment was the stuff of *Final Destination*: idiotic novice kayaker dies from technical class 3 rapid due to stupidity and drowning. Awesome. Luckily the hole pushed me out, and I managed to wriggle in my boat to get my head above water, but the boat itself was still on top of me. I struggled to get to the narrow bank where I saw the other kayakers running to meet me. I’m not going to lie. I blushed crimson red when I thought about the situation, me dog-paddling frantically to shore with a bright blue inflatable kayak hovering over me, sucking me under when I bounced off rocks.

Eventually I got out. The guys caught up with me (no falls, mind you), and Dave’s first question was if I was all right. Greg’s was, “Oh, you’re fine. I’ve had worst falls than that.” I would be remiss if I didn’t admit that right then I wanted to fight him- *Fight Club* style. Dave later asked me why I didn’t detach myself from the skirt. Greg had showed me how to do it before we started. “Sorry, I must have been thinking about rafting in Costa Rica,” I mumbled as I realized the irony of that situation. I would love to say that I’ve become a better listener. But that would be a lie.

Circles of Descent

—
KATE HARKINS



One more thing:
I have some time
and the whole light of the sky
and love
the beautiful predator
circling overhead,
a natural ambush,

shadow on white
an arrow, a wing,
cuneiform heart,
rolling, rolling,
no translation possible

just flight's texture
and strange timing,
the many circles
of descent.

A Lump in the Throat

CHELSEY BURDEN



If you cut apart a chicken, you may find,
upon opening the gizzard, a handful of pebbles.

These birds swallow small rocks, make their own teeth.
A grinder for all seeds to pass through.

Roasting the body in garlic and rosemary, my friend
shows me the mason jar he saved the pebbles in.

Clinking against the glass,
light pink, grey, black. Small as bird eyes.

There are eyes in my throat,
gone blind, turned to stone.

Pressing my vocal chords, garbling.
I can't get them out through my mouth.

Or I don't try hard enough. By tongue nor teeth.
And these stones grind nothing, not these seeds

seeping into my consciousness
Porous, absorbent as soil or skin.

Some stones fall into the pit of my stomach.
They sit. Coals in my solar plexus.

The weight of the seen but unspoken.
Or if you cut them out through my trachea,

and drop these pebbled pupils in a jar,
they will unravel and turn to black ribbon.

Typewriter ribbon, imprinted with ivory letters
that form words if you listen close.

No.
If I speak clearly.

Isaac

CHARLIE BYNAR



In the Kitchen Sink

JAMES JAY



For the cat faced
spider I carry on the corner
of my dish washing sponge,

I am the god, the multi-eyed
god for whom he prayed
throughout the dark, dark night.

The latch on the backdoor clicks
open; its sound loud
as a dozen miracles.

Outside when he crawls
to the eggshells atop
the compost pile

it's as if I exist
finally,
as if my whole being, the entirety of my life spun

from his eight legged need.
And now? And now to do what?
Back up the steps?

On the porch free of all duty,
for all of this, who
do I thank? Who?

Apples to Pears

RYAN ADAMS



Up Here



KERRY BENNETT



Up here

The silent mountains are my solace,
Your unseen presence, my landmark.

Up here

The warm, dry winds carry the sound of your beating heart.

Up here

The clouds wander like souls above us,
Looking for loved ones and spirits of the past.
I wander the streets looking for your smile.

Up here

Freshly washed with summer rain,
Pine needles glisten in sunlight,
The way your eyes light up in laughter.

Up here

The earth is ruddy, sharp, rocky.
I run my hands over your face, but it is dusty red stone,
With a prickly pear beard.

Up here

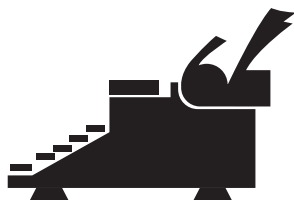
As wild flowers blanket the meadows and stars veil the skies,
I piece together this quilt of words in my native tongue,
So that someday you might lift your head

Up here

And listen.

Like Rain

KERRI QUINN



The neighbor kids, a brother and sister—noses flat, teaspoon-shaped eyes, and bangs like threads that stop right above their eyebrows—throw stones at an abandoned van. It's August in Tucson. The van's been parked outside her mother's condo since June, when Kathleen came to stay. Her mother, Eileen, loves the van's purple-tie dyed curtains, its splotchy-rusted panels, and two flat tires because the van reminds her of her hippie days when she traveled the California coast following the Grateful Dead with her first love, Gary. They sold veggie burritos and gave Tarot card readings out of their baby blue colored VW bus. Eileen also loves listening to the neighbor kids throw stones at the van. The stones make a ping-ping sound as rock hits metal.

The kids' mother wears moccasin slippers and shuffles between their apartment and the laundry room while the kids spend their day orbiting the van. When they're not throwing stones, they pretend to be statues, balancing on one leg, arms reaching toward the sky, their bodies twitching as they try to be still. The kids remind Kathleen of the pair of pink plastic flamingos Eileen kept in the front yard until Kathleen convinced her they needed to go away. Like the tacky flamingos, Kathleen would like to lock the kids in the shed out back and hide the key.

The kids throw more stones at the van. Rock hits metal. Kathleen adjusts the blinds in her mother's bedroom.

"That sound drives me crazy," Kathleen says.

"They're playing," Eileen says. Her cancer voice is husky like a man's.

Eileen lies in bed, a thin cotton blanket wrapped around her, wearing her favorite fishing hat, a fake daisy is pinned to the brim. Her long thick silver hair is gone. A few days ago Kathleen brought her home from the hospital. The bedroom is filled with Eileen's favorite flower, white lilies, and smells like Bengay and the peppermint oil Kathleen rubs on her mother's feet and hands.

“Go to the mall,” Eileen says. “Do something fun.”

“The mall?” Kathleen says.

“Or Mexico,” her mother says. “Fishing.”

“And leave you?”

“Hell yes.”

Kathleen turns away from this stranger, with her thick voice—who late at night calls for Lorraine, the wiry bull terrier that was hit by a car after Kathleen left for college. Kathleen’s afraid to leave because she might get in the car and never come back. Before she arrived in June, she told Matthew, her fiancé, to take the job in London. To go without her. Kathleen didn’t believe her mother would die. And he did.

They sold their condo in New Mexico and she quit her job at the Georgia O’Keefe Museum. Kathleen drove Matthew to the airport. He said he should stay. She told him to go and promised she would join him in a few months, when her mother got better. Interstate Ten from New Mexico to Arizona. The road was windy. The sky filled with kidney-bean shaped clouds.

Kathleen was afraid she would never see Matthew again.

Afraid to be alone with her mother and this illness.

“Her breath is shallow. Her skin papery, the color of cigarette smoke.”

“Go to London,” her mother says. “Today. Go.”

“You’re crazy,” Kathleen says.

“I’m going to die either way,” Eileen says, coughs, her fingers grip the plastic-covered mattress. Her face is pink, strained. The fishing hat falls to the floor. Kathleen gives Eileen a pill, holds a glass of water to her mouth. Water spills down her chin. Kathleen gently wipes it away.

More stones hit the side of the van. Rock hits metal. The neighbor kids laugh like small crazy drunk people. Kathleen wants to laugh like them: Out of control. Reckless.

“I’m telling them to stop,” Kathleen says.

“Don’t,” Eileen says.

“They’re a menace,” Kathleen says. “Unsupervised.”

More stones hit the side of the van.

“It sounds like rain,” Eileen says and reaches for Kathleen’s hand.

Eileen falls asleep. Her breath is shallow. Her skin papery, the color of cigarette smoke. Once full and round, her breasts are now deflated and flat. Only a few months ago she had joked that she was relieved she'd never have to wear a bra ever again. They were at the hospital. IV tubes plugged into her mother's arms. The blue ID bracelet hanging loosely from her wrist. In solidarity, Kathleen took her bra off and tied it to the IV stand. The night nurse, Carly with the long nose and infectious laugh, carrying a tray of smashed peas and wilted lettuce, poked her head into the room. She put down the tray, removed her top, her red padded bra, and placed it next to Kathleen's.

Kathleen picks up the fishing hat that fell to the floor, places it next to a get well card from her father. On the front of the card is Jesus dressed in a long red robe. He is resting his head against the shoulder of a very tall angel. Sweat and blood drip down Jesus' face. He looks so sad. Kathleen's parents divorced when she was five. Bob, her father, moved to Boise to get his Ph.D. in rocks. Eileen refused to leave Tucson. She said she would freeze to death in any state that began with the letter "I." After a semester in Boise, Bob found religion and a girlfriend who also loved rocks.

Kathleen picks up the card. She can't remember the last time she walked into a church. She can't remember the last time she prayed, nor can she remember much of the last few months. They're hazy, hectic. She wishes she had gone to London and taken her mother with her. Matthew would have taken care of Eileen. Better than Kathleen. He would have been patient. Loving. He would have talked to Eileen unlike Kathleen who left the room when she heard Eileen's thick voice ask her a question. Matthew and Eileen loved to sit in the kitchen as he chopped things: onions, mushrooms, garlic for pots of soup or pasta sauce. They chatted incessantly. About the newest film he was making or the time in San Francisco when Eileen met Gerry Garcia's cousin backstage. Kathleen listened. An observer, slightly jealous. But that's somebody else's life.

Eileen coughs. Kathleen freezes, ready to give her a pill. The coughing stops. Kathleen folds her hands, closes her eyes. She prays for the floor to open and swallow the pill bottles, the plastic-covered mattress, the smell of peppermint and Bengay. She prays for the flowers

to vanish. Kathleen gets on her knees, the moon white and round in the sky, the night so quiet it hurts, and prays for the stranger in the bed to disappear.

That night her mother dies.

*

Bob remarried the summer Kathleen turned ten. It was also the summer Eileen left the second fiancé, the Accountant, because he didn't make her laugh, so she decided to take up fishing. She packed the car and Kathleen and drove over the border to Mexico. Before they reached the fishing village, they stopped at a roadside restaurant for fish tacos and icy Cokes in tiny glass bottles. A vendor came up to their table selling fishing hats. Eileen bought the hat with the flower pinned to the brim. The morning of their first fishing expedition, rising behind the sparse palm trees, the sun was the color of a tangerine. Down a dusty road, past small pink bungalows, Kathleen carried the fishing poles, her mother wore the fishing hat, and they headed for the dock. In the early morning, they sat shivering, poles pressed against the top of their thighs, the water lapping gently against the wooden posts.

"I hope we catch a Beluga," Kathleen said.

"Of course we will." Eileen stood, angled the pole toward the sky. She extended her arm straight and taut like a dancer's, snapped her wrist.

The line disappeared into the dark. The lure dropped into the water.

Kathleen clapped. Her mother bowed. The only thing they caught that morning was a cracked bicycle helmet. Driving back to Tucson, Eileen said to Kathleen: "We should have gone to Boise."

*

Kathleen calls the funeral parlor, her mother's sister Caroline, Matthew, and Bob, her father, who apologizes for too many things and promises to take the first flight out. Kathleen makes a gin and tonic. It's 8:30 in the morning.

"Why didn't you take us with you?" Kathleen says to Bob.

"I have to go," he says.

"You should have insisted."

Bob doesn't respond.

"I have to go," Kathleen says. "I left her alone." She hangs up,

walks down the hall to Eileen's bedroom.

The sun, through the bedroom blinds, casts pyramid shadows on the wooden floor. Kathleen can't remember opening them. She can't remember what she said to her father.

"Wake up," Kathleen whispers to her mother, shakes the bed gently. Eileen looks like she's napping. Her hands by her side, her fingers are not gripping the side of the mattress.

"Please," Kathleen says.

The neighbor kids are outside playing Marco Polo. The boy yells "Marco." His sister responds, "Marco."

"I didn't mean it," Kathleen says, shakes the bed again.

Rock hits metal. The kids shout "Marco" in unison. Over and over.

"Polo," Kathleen yells, shuts the window. She takes the Jesus card, the fishing hat, and leaves the room.

*

Thick, scalloped clouds gather over the top of the Santa Catalina Mountains to the north of Tucson.

"Walter drapes a crisp sheet over Eileen, and whispers to her that it might rain today."

Kathleen waits on the front porch for the funeral director, a second gin and tonic at her feet. Before the world was awake, Eileen would begin her day drinking cups of espresso and cloud watching from the porch despite the fact that the summer heat drove mere mortals indoors until October. When Kathleen was about to leave for college in Boston, Eileen had told her that she felt protected here by the mountains, surrounding the city with their granite walls, jagged crags, and sharp peaks, her fortress Eileen called it.

The phone rings. Kathleen hesitates, then goes inside to answer it. It's Matthew. He tells Kathleen he shouldn't have left.

"She was supposed to get better," Kathleen says.

"I know," Matthew says.

"What do we do?" Kathleen asks.

"We may have to start believing in heaven," he says.

"Or something," she says.

Kathleen hangs up, returns to the porch. The funeral director pulls up in a shiny black hearse. He's gangly, wears a gray pin-striped

suit, no tie. In the center of his dark eyebrows is a patch of gray hair. He smells like cigarette smoke. His name is Walter.

Walter drapes a crisp sheet over Eileen, and whispers to her that it might rain today. Kathleen leaves the bedroom. He pushes the gurney to the front door. She sees the outline of her mother's nose, her chin against the sheet. Kathleen sits down on the couch.

"Do you have a cigarette?" she asks.

Walter pulls a pack from his shirt pocket, slits open the cellophane, hands one to her.

"She thinks I quit," Kathleen says.

"She'd understand," he says.

Kathleen looks up at the living room ceiling, at the spidery cracks above the bay window. Walter touches her shoulder, then gently shimmies the gurney through the narrow front door, glides the gurney toward the back of the hearse. Kathleen shuts the front door, sits on the floor, and waits. Walter starts the limo and drives away.

The neighbor kids are in the parking lot yelling Polo at the top of their lungs. Kathleen waits. The phone rings. She doesn't answer it. The kids throw stones at the van. Rock hits metal. They switch from yelling "Polo" over and over to "Marco" again and again. Where is their mother, Kathleen thinks. Where is mine?

She goes to the kitchen. Rummaging through a junk drawer, she finds the lighter, silver-plated and shaped like a woman, the one she bought when she and her mother went to Spain after they learned Eileen was sick. "We need sangria," her mother said. They traveled from Barcelona to Madrid, smoking American Spirits, the ones in the blue pack, drinking with Spanish men in sunny plazas. That year she and her mother gave each other nicotine patches for Christmas.

Kathleen lights the cigarette, opens the kitchen window, throws up in the sink.

*

Then she begins to pack. She takes photographs of Eileen in that fishing hat, her Julia Child cookbooks, a stack of Elvis 45s and tosses them into a box.

"Where are you?" Kathleen says, walks from the living room to Eileen's room. The bed is empty. The sheets are twisted together like vines. Kathleen's breath is caught in her lungs.

“Where?” she says to the tangled sheets. What she wanted was for the sick version of her mother to disappear leaving behind her real mother, the woman with a silky laugh and skin like cream.

Kathleen turns on the TV. The thin, blonde-haired announcer on The Weather Channel says that it will be another dog day of summer in Tucson.

“No shit,” Kathleen says, walks to the kitchen. She expects to find Eileen at the kitchen table with a pile of opened cookbooks in front of her, the pages stained with red wine. The room is empty, the cracked bicycle helmet they caught on the fishing trip after her parents divorced is on top of the refrigerator. Kathleen puts the helmet on.

“We should have caught a Beluga,” Kathleen says, tightens the strap under her chin.

“I wasn’t kidding when I said hot,” the TV announcer says.

“You’re being repetitive.” Kathleen grabs the car keys from the kitchen counter, and drives to the liquor store to get more boxes.

*

The year Kathleen turned fifteen her mother’s third fiancé, the Pilot from Texas—as big as Texas and part of New Mexico— moved in with them. He arrived with a smoker, a deep fryer, and a case of Polish vodka. He consumed barbeque sauce as if it was water. He was leery of Kathleen and her mother, their closeness. The way they held hands even in the grocery store and he didn’t like the fact that Kathleen called him the Pilot, though her mother called him that, too. House rules were instituted: Kathleen couldn’t have friends over during the week and the Pilot insisted that he and her mother eat dinner alone. A vegetarian, Kathleen ate at the kitchen table, relieved that she didn’t have to watch the Pilot lick his barbeque-covered fingers. While Kathleen ate, Eileen brined ribs, smoked brisket and deep fried chicken parts. She also began to make her coleslaw, pouring jars of mayonnaise on cabbage she shredded herself. The Pilot loved his coleslaw soupy. After dinner, on the front porch, the Pilot and her mother smoked too much, drank too much vodka, then fought too much about their never-ending engagement. Kathleen’s bedroom was right above the porch.

“I need more time,” Eileen said to the Pilot.

“Time for what?” he said.

After three months, the fighting, the smoking, the drinking was

too much for Kathleen, so she moved to Boise to live with Bob, her father, and his wife, Anna. He told Kathleen they were horticulturists.

"I could check that out," Kathleen said.

Eileen brought her to the airport. Eileen's toes and fingernails were painted red. She wore a trench coat, strappy black sandals, and dark glasses. The Pilot didn't like her long hippie skirts and bare feet. She held an unlit cigarette between her long fingers. She looked like a spy. Kathleen reached for Eileen's hand.

"It's too much," Eileen said and walked away.

Families were everywhere. A brother and sister dressed in matching navy blue shirts and white shorts played a game of War by the water fountain. A mother wearing with a purple bandana tied around her hair scolded her son as chocolate ice cream dripped down his hand, his forearm. A tall man with mole on the side of his cheek that looked like a penny talked to his wife and daughter. They were laughing. They had shiny white teeth. They looked happy. Where do these families come from, Kathleen thought.

"I'll call every day," Kathleen said to Eileen.

"They were laughing. They had shiny white teeth. They looked happy."

And Kathleen did. Every night after dinner. But Eileen was quiet or had to get off the phone: She was either on her way to the store to buy vodka for the

Pilot or marinating ribs.

It was a solemn six months. Kathleen's father and Anna talked softly and gardened. Kathleen helped them construct a tunnel of bird netting over heirloom tomato seedlings. They went to church twice a week, drove home, and in low voices talked about how they enjoyed Minister Carol's sermon about compassion. They ate dinner in front of the TV, the sound barely on.

Late one night, Kathleen called her mother.

"These nights are so dark," Eileen said.

"Where's the Pilot?" Kathleen asked.

"I told him to cook his own ribs," Eileen said. "I want you to like it there."

That night Kathleen took a bus from Boise to Tucson. She

sat next to a guy with a mullet who whistled through his teeth when he talked. Somewhere outside of Las Vegas, the bus almost empty, Kathleen had to lock her herself in the bathroom because the mullet guy kept trying to touch her breasts.

Two days later. Kathleen arrived to her mother's around midnight. Eileen sat on the couch, an afghan around her shoulders, a small Irish Terrier curled on her lap. Every light in the house on.

"This is Lorraine," Eileen said to Kathleen as she petted the dog.

*

It's dark when Kathleen pulls into the parking lot with a handful of Slim Jims, two pounds of ground beef, and a package of Q-tips. She's still wearing the bike helmet. One of the van's back windows is cracked. The condo is still. Pieces of Eileen's life are half-packed. The fishing hat is on the coffee table. Kathleen picks it up and walks outside. The night is warm, the sky flecked with stars. She looks up, trying to remember the sound of Eileen's voice as she told rambling stories about her father and his rocks. But Kathleen can hear the gurgling sound in her own throat. She can only picture Eileen in that bed, frail and thin, fingernails digging into the sides of the mattress. Kathleen throws the hat at the sky. It lands by the van on top of the asphalt.

*

Kathleen wakes in the morning, goes outside to look for it, but the hat is gone. Walter, the funeral director, calls to remind Kathleen that she needs to drop off an outfit for her mother.

"She hates the dark," Kathleen says.

He pauses. She stands barefoot in the kitchen, stares out the window, plays with the lighter she left on the counter.

"I have a flashlight," he says.

"She'd appreciate that."

Eileen's bed sheets and the Jesus card are on the table. The room smells like peppermint oil. Kathleen put the sheets and the card in the oven, slams the door shut.

The neighbor kids are in the parking lot throwing stones at the van. Kathleen opens the front door. The girl is wearing the fishing hat, tilted to one side. The daisy gone. Kathleen runs outside, yanks the hat from the girl's head.

The girl grabs it back, dashes behind a scraggly willow tree.

Bangs plastered against her forehead, she puts the hat on, places her hands on her hips, and laughs at Kathleen, “Stop it.”

Kathleen picks up a stone and throws it at the girl. It lands in a pile of dry leaves close to her feet.

“You’re not supposed to throw rocks at people,” the girl says.

Kathleen throws another one at her but misses.

“Throw it at the van,” the boy says and hands Kathleen a rock. She aims for the van’s splotchy side-panel, draws her arm back like a bow, hits the side window. The purple curtain sways. The glass cracks and unravels like a spool of thread.

And then there is a free-for-all. They grab fistfuls of rocks and throw them at the van. At the trees. At the sky. Kathleen is sweating. Her hands are dirty. Fingernails broken. The boy yells “Marco” over and over. When there are no more rocks to throw, the kids begin to jump up and down. Kathleen jumps up and down with them. The hat falls from the girl’s head. Kathleen picks it up and puts it back on her. The girl takes Kathleen’s hand, the boy takes the other. The three keep jumping and yelling “Marco” over and over until the kids collapse to the ground. But Kathleen keeps jumping because she doesn’t know what to do if she stops.

The laundry room door opens. The kids’ mother walks toward them, the sound of shuffling slippers on concrete. The girl raises one leg, places a foot to the inside of her thigh. The boy follows her lead. They stand like flamingos, shoulders tucked, hands clasped behind their backs. The mother says something to them, but they don’t move. Their long legs twitching as they try to be still.

Kathleen raises her own arms above her head. Looking up at the sky—a gray monochrome sea—she places a foot to the inside of her thigh, and imagines her mother sitting under a bright yellow umbrella at a café in Madrid, flirting with a Spanish waiter.

Fever



SARAH ADAMS



Charcoal outlines a horizon.
Silver beams stroke clouds
come to gentle rest on a windowsill.

Sheets are worn, the bed is empty,
dressers soon to be hallowed.

Exposed womanly beauty,
naked softness of skin and flesh
illuminates in silver light
chills born from the hungry night.

Your touch was of
the desert,
of bright sun.
I miss my fever.

Wait at the window
cold with moonbeam
and long for
the desert,
for the
warmth of day.

I will try to recall times
underneath checkered blankets
and unfinished ghost stories,
ice cream bowls,
of blushing and sweet laughter.
Then,
I know we were happy.

The Hired Gun

CHARLIE BYNAR



Taking the Stars

MARY SORJOURNER



“Our bodies contain three grams of iron, three grams of bright, silver-white manganese and copper. Proportionate in size, they are among the weightiest atoms in our bodies, and they came from the same source, a long-ago star. There are pieces of star within us all.”

---Vincent Cronin

We are made from stars. We are contained by stars. Aldebaran, Capella, Castor, Procyon, Rigel and Sirius make up a vast winter/spring hexagon in the sky of the Northern Hemisphere, six angles of light and dark forming a glittering shape holding our imaginings and our calibrations. I can look up past our Ponderosa trees and understand how this North Country and its bright black sky carry me – and let me wash up onto the uncertain shore of my future.

Over twelve years ago, I stepped out in the company of another to watch last sunlight through the network of pine branches behind my cabin. My lover held my old black cat in his arms. I walked out into the meadow and saw the delicate sliver of a waxing moon. I called to the man. He carried old Thomas to my side. It was too early to see the Great Hexagon lay over us, or know that the web in which my companion and I were contained was tearing beyond repair. I ignored the signs of damage: I had not written a word for the two months my beloved had lived near me.

Years later, a friend told me a dream. She said that she and a man had stepped out from their separate homes to walk in the night. Intention would bring them together. The practice was called, “Taking the stars.” She said that both alone and in the man’s company she felt joyful and content. It seemed to both of us that “taking the stars” might have been an old expression for courtship. And that “taking” was more

than gazing, it was a deep receiving. I remembered my grandmother talking about “taking the air,” when she went for a walk. And how, as a little girl, I imagined not so much her steps, but her steady breaths.

I wonder if we “take the stars” when we create – especially if our making is less the product of pushing words or paint or sounds or gestures into place, but is the unsettling emptiness of being a conduit. We are space receiving. Holding dear. Releasing.

Now, I walk out into the twilight trees with only myself for companion. The beloved is long gone. Thomas, the old cat, roamed out one night and never came back. But now, alone, and in so many ways not alone, I will walk the old dirt road between the trees and I will take the stars, in much the same way that I have been writing all these years since that silent and icy night when my lover set Thomas gently in my arms.

My words have continued to burn from within and without. My hands have moved on the keyboard emptying out an emptiness I once thought would kill me. In its place, I have found the immutable moon, a great hexagon of light above the dark pine – and a conversation with a friend to whom I have promised that I will write about “emptying out the emptiness.”

I will walk the old dirt road till night falls. I’ll look up into the April sky, see the shining hexagon of light and I will remember that we sometimes “take the light” beaming into our eyes and minds from stars long dead. And I will be grateful that we, who are living stars, can - as long as we have breath, touch and intention - make beauty.

Untitled



NOLAN HINKLE



Nolan Hinkle Photography



The Moon's Aubade

JAMES JAY



While the moon cuts through
the open blinds of the window
over the oak table, splashing its panels,

I make my notes—

pencil scratches on cardstock.

The dogs snore and snore.

My son in his crib

in the next room, I came home

to his sleeping. I left

before his waking, while time tangled

like curly blond hair

in a rat's nest of days.

I consider knocking on his door

to bring him peas and a spoon,

to see how he shovels

at their elusiveness.

But he is obliged to dream
of dinosaurs, of monkeys, the statue
of a green metal frog. Morning
brings him the business

of breakfast and swim class. Commitments
bring us so many consonants followed
by the coos of have toos, so
some days we miss and miss.

Son, don't ever think I punch the time clock
early for wanting to hear something else.
Don't ever think I fire my truck up
for wanting to drive away.

The Permutation of Time and Space



ALEXANDER C. CHOPIN

Soft rays of the morning sun struck the tree and gnawed at the clumps of snow resting upon its branches. They sloughed off as the day wore on, finally exposing the old oak's barren limbs to the nurturing light. Another Long Cold had come and gone. The tree could feel it in the air. Soon its leaves would return and the cycle of their growth and fall would begin again.

It had been the only constant in the tree's long life. Its world had changed much since it had sprouted from the earth. At one time it had been surrounded by countless other trees and could see a great mountain in the distance. The mountain had always been there after every Cold, and the tree thought it always would be. The tree had known its every curve, its every contour, had studied it till the sight of the snowcapped peak ceased to fill the tree with awe.

Then came strange bird-like animals. They came with sharp sticks and cut down many of the other trees. The tree felt their loss only as one who has stayed with the same friend and lover for centuries can. Their absence tore at the tree bitterly, yet there was a tinge excitement at the idea of change. And still the mountain loomed.

Soon the strange birds built immense nests of stone and ice all around the tree. Some of them would stay and rest beneath its shade as the wolves and elk once did. Initially they had all seemed quite the same to the tree, but it learned to tell them apart very quickly. Better still, they all seemed more and more diverse with every passing of warmth and cold. This delighted the tree. Every day brought something

new where before the dropping of a pine cone or a squirrel running up its trunk was a momentous occasion.

After many passings of sun and ice, the odd, chattering birds built one of their nests right in front the tree's view of the mountain. No more could it see the omnipresent, soaring peak poking up above its fellow trees. Yet the tree was not particularly bothered. Here was something novel to study, whereas the mountain had been there since the tree had sprouted and doubtless stood there still. For a time the tree was fascinated by the ways its reflection wavered in the ice that would not melt, and it grew to know every angle and chip in the stone of the immense nest.

It was many passings of cold and warm before the tree began to miss the way that sunlight would sparkle and play atop the mountain's snowy peak, especially when it would awaken after the Long Cold. In fact, the tree realized that it did not even know if the mountain still stood. But in all of its time standing and gathering the sun's radiance and soaking in water through its roots, the tree had deigned to no longer be troubled by the chaotic world around it.

Though it might not live to see it, the strange birds would be gone one day, and maybe the sun would fade. For now it would stretch forth its branches and wait for its leaves to be replenished. The cycle was the only constant. And perhaps even then, it too might change.

New the Marrow

CHARLIE BYNAR



