

The Blue Guitar



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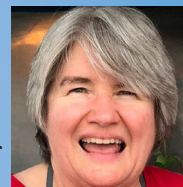
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Editor's Note

As writers, poets and artists, our work bears witness to the human condition and our collective experiences. We may start from an individual point of view, but the personal soon becomes universal as the work's creator opens their world to the reader and viewer. For the Fall 2024 issue, our cup runneth over: Writers, poets and artists from all walks of life have generously shared their experiences, perspectives, observations and themes — just in time for Thanksgiving. For them sharing their work with us, we are truly blessed.



Co-Editor
Rebecca
"Becca" Dyer

We are also thankful for beautiful weather and a strong turnout earlier in November for our annual The Blue Guitar Festival of the Arts, which featured musical performances, literary readings, and art activities for children. A huge thank-you to our Arizona Consortium for the Arts CEO Elena Thornton for organizing and running the festival; her husband, Jim Thornton, for performing in two musical acts and for helping to set up; our partner group the Creative Drill Sergeants for helping to sponsor the festival and to help set up; and Desert Ridge Marketplace for providing the venue.

Have a wonderful holiday as you enjoy our latest issue. Keep up the fantastic work, keep on submitting and keep on reading!

Rebecca "Becca" Dyer
Co-Editor

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Fall 2024

3 Poems by Roxanne Doty

My Mesquite Tree

is a volunteer, growing in parched soil
from a stray seed maybe dormant
for years blown in on the wind
from a neighbor's yard or through the alley
in the kingdom of night as I slept dreaming
of wildflowers.

It looks forlorn as if uncertain
where it belongs, how it should grow
what it should be
appears more like a bush
than a commanding presence
like the wildflowers
blooming as if the world waited
for them, longed for their bold colors.

At times, I think the mesquite is dying,
skinny brown limbs, skeletal,
almost ugly. I could dig it up,
toss it for bulk garbage.
But, it came to me when nothing else
would and when heat flares
it becomes lush with canopy,
deeply green, almost graceful
and I am reminded
of the changing face of wonder.

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Roxanne Doty lives in Tempe, Arizona. Her debut novel, "Out Stealing Water," was published by Regal House Publishing, Aug. 30, 2022. Her first poetry collection will be published by Kelsay Books in the spring of 2024. She has published stories and poems in Third Wednesday, Quibble Lit, Superstition Review, Espacio Fronterizo, Ocotillo Review, Forge, I70 Review, Soundings Review, The Blue Guitar, Four Chambers Literary Magazine, Lascaux Review, Lunaris Review, Journal of Microliterature, NewVerseNews, International Times, Saranac Review, Gateway Review and Reunion-The Dallas Review. Her short story "Turbulence" (Ocotillo Review) was nominated for the 2019 Pushcart prize for short fiction.

QT Quick Tanning Lotion by Coppertone

Was my mom's triumph, her act of resistance
at Martin's department store, evening shift
fine men's clothing department.

No slacks allowed for women workers,
hose **mandated**. Silky smooth, flawless
beige, no black, deep brown or fishnets

She said they suffocated her legs
an artificial layer of skin, an intrusion,
hot on humid summer days, expensive,

prone to unsightly rips like railroad
tracks running down her legs
marring the beige perfection.

QT was a miracle from the goddesses,
a weapon against unfairness and evil
disguised as femininity enhancers.

I watched her rub the chemical-laden lotion
into her skin, spread it evenly with no streaks
careful not to miss a spot.

The scent was distinctive like all suntan lotion,
reminding me of the beach, salt water
and crashing waves that pulled the sand

from under my feet and shot a thrill
through my body. But, the chemicals
overpowered like insect repellent

seeping into the soft skin of my mom's
tired legs as they turned a shade
desired to fool the male managers

who walked the aisles of Martin's
fine men's wear and policed the legs
of women workers.

Panty hose became a symbol to me
of all the shit thrown at women
trying to make a living.

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16th Street and Van Buren

(after Tom Waits' 9th and Hennepin)

Well it's sixteenth and Van Buren
all the traffic signals smolder
like smoke from sidewalk fires
the twenty-four-hour Jack-in-the-Box
waits for light to sweep the skyline
in this city of renegade dreamers
and equity billionaires
the fire hydrants watch like sad Buddhas
they've seen it all
the way time drips like a leaky faucet
the teeth marks of dollar signs
but all the new high-rises are gold
they shimmer beyond themselves
soar like the prices of life
above the grit in this stolen city
of heat and vanquished barrios
this outlaw city buried beneath
the myth of eternal rebirth

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4 Poems by Alfred Fournier

If I Could Move Like Paula Abdul

for Joanne

I'd shimmer and shine like a polished jewel,
as easy and fine as pink champagne.
If I could move like Paula Abdul,

I'd slip from the window, I'd leap from the stool.
I'd have nothing to prove and less to explain.
I'd shimmer and shine like a polished jewel,

bare skin aglow at the edge of the pool,
smile as pure as white sugar cane.
If I could move like Paula Abdul,

I'd whirl through the crowd like nobody's fool.
I'd pause for effect, an elegant crane.
I'd shimmer and shine like a polished jewel.

Admired and loved 'cause I'm slick, bright and cool,
I'd meet every glance with a love unfeigned.
If I could move like Paula Abdul,

I'd glide like a falcon, the world to rule.
Benevolent smile, magnificent reign.
I'd shimmer and shine like a polished jewel,
If I could move like Paula Abdul.

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Alfred Fournier is the author of "A Summons on the Wind" (2023, Kelsay Books). His poems have appeared in Indianapolis Review, Gyroscope Review, the Main Street Rag, The Blue Guitar and elsewhere. He lives in the foothills of South Mountain with his remarkable wife and daughter and two birdwatching cats.



The Love of the Little Boy, the Mother and the Thrush

after Alicia Ostriker

To be loved
said the little boy
is to run
where you can hear
the echo
of wood thrush song

To be loved
said the thrush
is to let the song
of sun and leaf
and stream
flow ever through you

To be loved
said the mother
is to close your arms
around the child
to wipe a smudge
of forest floor
from the blossom
of his cheek

© 2024

In the dream where my friend introduced me to a man from his town

who, he proudly boasted, played Weyoun on Deep Space Nine, he was, in fact, a heavyset, slightly autistic kid in his twenties who cringed when I asked about his role on Star Trek.

"I don't like to talk about that," he shrugged and suggested we create a sketch, Monty Python style, of a man who walks into a cheese shop and asks for an opera, running down a list of famous shows, but the proprietor has none of them in stock. I pause, then admit I'm not familiar with a broad range of opera names, and he chuckles, "Me neither," and Googles a list we can work from.

He's a nice guy, funny and easy going, looking for the comfort of friendly banter, some company and light entertainment along this often troublesome voyage of life, a mystery beyond him and out of his control. He has soft brown eyes and when I respond, "Sure, that sounds like fun," they brighten for an instant to a golden sheen, and we set about memorizing the names: Tosca, Carmen, Porgy and Bess, The Marriage of Figaro, Lady Macbeth, Don Carlos, La Bohème, and we spend the afternoon laughing like old friends, only after I promise never to ask about his Star Trek days again. Which of course, I don't.

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The Power of Forgetting

Suppose you were born today,
opening your eyes for the first time
on this stranger's life you inhabit.

Suppose you're an adult
with no memories, no ties to the past.
There is only what you will do today.

Suppose you look into your lover's eyes
for the very first time again. A light rain
makes music through a window.

Suppose the joyless job you'd mastered
was nothing but a repetitive dream.
Your boss, the company, immaterial, gone.

Suppose the rain stops. You take a walk
along the beach, bare feet on wet sand,
the sky an open wonder.

Suppose there's no past infraction to forgive,
no future life you can't imagine.
Stop and close your eyes.

Listen.
What do you hear calling
in the rhythm of the waves?

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5 Poems by Susan Cummins Miller

Exodus

Once upon a time,
craving Thoreau's tonic
of wildness, geography of hope, faculty
of wonder restored, I went up the mountain,
alone, seeking to engage
the power of silence.

I stood atop a ridge
I hadn't summited before, listening
to the sky singing in the heat
of afternoon, hearing the earth chanting
in the Mother Tongue: vanished songs
from falling-down ruins

hidden under a fall-away rim: elemental
stories spiced with secrets
known to travelers who built
temporary dwelling places in a country
that can never be owned. I did not
come down empty-handed.

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Tucson writer Susan Cummins Miller's books include the forthcoming Keridec Rees historical mystery "My Bonney Lies Under" and six Frankie MacFarlane, Geologist, mysteries, a nonfiction anthology, and two poetry collections: "Making Silent Stones Sing" and "Deciphering the Desert," winner of the 2024 Will Rogers Medallion Award in Western Written Poetry. www.susancumminsmiller.com



Above Mussel Rock, San Francisco Peninsula

Drowned world. Vulnerable headland. Houses perched on the rim like gargoyles on Notre-Dame. Coastline recurves in a maze of coves. Breakers breathe, eddies mutter, wiping out old landmarks. Tidal flats reflect the molten gold of sunset fire splashing cliff walls. Over my right shoulder, in the fading light, orientation recedes, ceases. Silent withdrawal exposes sensitive experiences. I've been here before, but I forget when—spent resources erase and centrifugal nature suspends the endless quest for deep, abiding memory. Listening to nature's continual revamping—surf assaulting strand and rock, wind saltating sand on shifting dunes, frost heaving in cracks and crevices—reveals erosion, destruction, entropy. And new directions. Escaping back to the landing that holds a residue of innocence. Rediscovering in friable fragments hidden song lyrics, words ringing with knowing coiled at the base of sea-worn ramparts. Encountering the impenetrable simple secret of Time hitched to stars, to a deeper power invited to return with questions, with seeking. Feed the song.

© 2024

Grace

The sun draws up
a blanket of clouds. Grackles call:
graceless whistles above the constant
hum of cars, the roar
of lawnmower and carwash next door.

No way to escape
the busyness, the scurrying, the need
to speak and move
at breakneck pace—the need to speak
or move at all.

A maid knocks
on the motel-room door. I break
my silence: *Please give me
thirty minutes.* She smiles and says:
Take all the time you need.

© 2024

Layover: Tucson

Pill bottle rattles like castanets
in her free hand, the one not
gripping her cane. Shuffling step
to the kitchen counter. Squint
at the raised directions on the label:
Squeeze and Twist Off.

Coughs shake her. Pale pills cascade.
Reaching, falling. Pushing the button.
Blacking out. Time lost.
Pounding. She pulls her body across a floor
lighted eerily by flashing red.
Senseless noises envelop, raining down

like blows. Room fades,
for a few seconds. Headlights
and shadowy figures. Bright lights.
A barrage of instructions flying
over her head. Then, blessed quiet
as profound as a deserted cemetery

in which only the willow trees whisper.
Tended by a man in patterned Scrubs
who reads the pulse in her finger, making notes
on a clipboard. She exhales a question.
He has no answer. But his eyes say:
People want to believe, desperately,

that someone can foretell the future.
This is as close as it gets—transfers and layovers.
So, go ahead, take that next breath, that next step
up many-trails mountain—that final attempt
at deciphering the meaning behind living
and dying, *On* and *Off*.

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Returning

In the hospital lobby I'm directed
to the bank of elevators. I choose
the slow measured ascent
of a flight of stairs to the third floor where
a team of specialists has stopped his heart. But not
the brain. Not dreams or memories.

*In the courtyard, amid a river
of broken shards, the fountain weeps
and rust-stained tufa blocks retain
still-wind heat and pulsating song.*

My question to the surgical team
five days ago: How
do you start his heart up again?

*Two strangers escaping
Cinco de Mayo celebrations slip
on slick flagstones. Tears track contours
of her cheekbones, lips.*

The surgeon's answer: "When blood reenters
the heart, it just starts beating. The heart always
wants to start beating." As if it's magic
that controls the very will to live.

*Seized by mariachi beats and flickering
light, his mind echoes a name breathed
just once, as shadows blotted
the wide-mouthed moon.*

Step by step, wondering
if the magic will hold,
I draw closer to the room
where past and future coalesce
in the limbo of an open heart.

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3 Poems by David Chorlton

A Suite for the Moon

Moonlight warm on the midnight grass,
thunder wrapped in clouds,
darkness breathing while a radio tuned
to the music the stars play
glows its listener to sleep.
Outside, and back

of the house a wash
flows toward the pond to which
the night comes to drink.
It kneels at the water
and sips reflections away,

gets up to follow dreams back
to their source,
the place in a mind that hears rain

and asks the lightning
if it's real.

Heads it'll rain, tails
stay dry. As brightly as it shows
its silver dollar shine it keeps
all secrets to itself but can't avoid asking

if we'd rather have good weather
in an imperfect world
or a cycle of drought where hummingbirds
live and justice prevails. Coyotes
see the same sky we do; they never

Continued on page 16



David Chorlton tries to make staying close to home into an asset when it comes to writing. Watching the birds and occasional other wildlife in the area becomes a lens through which to see more broadly how our human world and that of nature intersect. This summer saw the publication of a new book focused on parts of Arizona: "Dreams the Stones Have," from The Bitter Oleander Press.

try to answer it, they just
go where it leads them
drinking moonlight on the run.

Circle of hope
and despair, so nonchalant the way
it floats on darkness
glancing both ways at once.
It seems to be embedded

in silence, yet
every wolf and the prey it pursues
knows it's a howl
become light.

The jaguar tastes moonbeams in a kill.
He's moving through
old hunting grounds, his every step
a secret. Blue light, no light, he follows

a time scented trail
through night after night. The earth doesn't know

and the sky doesn't care
where he goes, where he stops, where
he bites and strips flesh
from the bone. It happens

so quickly the stars
never see as they pass
between the trees.

Windy moon. Late summer. Migration
underway. Pale morning sky,
no way back

into the night, lost wish following
the grosbeaks to
their winter forest.

© 2024

Cloudbreak

Three o'clock and summer quiet; cumulous
drifting on the sky. The seasons inside
South Mountain never change, it's always
rock and darkness there
when the slopes are shining and the ridgeline trails
off into doubt. For whom

will the next storm break? The high slopes ripple
beneath the sun, guardians
of coyote sleep. Late August, time
for seeking shelter in
memories of a stream that runs

through grass that cannot sleep
while overhead
is thunder so close it reveals
the smallest details of creation: lizard scales

and lightning, dragonflies in raindrops
and hummingbirds that drink
from the dark heart of a cloud.

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Summer Epilogue

The final summer days, last chance
to see the orioles, last question from the sky
asked of the mountain
that shouldered the heat until it darkened

for the stars to find their way.
Migration begins tonight,
drought spreads its wings
and the doves look south.
Stormclouds and high meadows, pines

and oaks and tanagers, sunlight dripping
from the edge of the Earth,
mystery flowing
downslope. Quail along the back wall, almost

grown. Desert breathing,
coyotes coming down from the clouds
to drink moonlight
from the pond with one eye always open.

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When your body is not your own

By J. Drew

© 2024

“All of your clothes are too loose,” his girlfriend said, hands on hips, examining his body up and down as her boyfriend got ready for their date night out with her friends.

Atlas’ plaid sleeves fell loosely at his wrists, possibly a hidden attempt at midwestern chic.

“You’re swimming in them,” she continued.

Atlas shrugged his shoulders, stating: “This feels good on me.”

Which in fact, was not a lie. This *did* feel good on him. It felt good on him like pulling the loose clothes over him had felt years ago when he still wore a binder and had a chest to cover up. After all, it was his first time wearing masculine clothing, which gave him the biggest high. It was like soaring above the clouds, seeing what you could be, seeing where you fit amongst the crowds. He liked how these clothes fit.

After all, he had gotten used to baggy clothes and styles that hid who he was. When you are an awkward, teenage-appearing human in the middle of your transition, you don’t want to stand out, like how his girlfriend asked him to do now, the prized masculine trophy amongst the rest of her single friends. He wanted to remain unknown, which was how the world treated him anyway. It all fits the narrative.

Ramona held up a shirt that was at least two sizes smaller. “Try this,” she protested, stuffing the cotton fabric full of hipster pineapples towards his shoulders. “It will *look* good on you.”

Atlas, appearing slightly defeated, marched into the closet, changed out the top and shuffled his feet back into the hallway to show her the tight fabric against his pec muscles like a pouting child. “This feels uncomfortable,” he quipped back at her. “It’s too small.”

Ramona rolled her eyes. “Why do you try so hard to *hide* who you are, Atlas?” She rubbed her hand over his chest and felt a warmth inside of her as her delicate hands rubbed the strength contained in those thick muscles.

He looked at her and then at his large plaid shirt hung delicately over the edge of his bed, where he had placed it carefully, lovingly, like a small child placing their animal friends against the pillow at night.

Seeing that his girlfriend would not be convinced of an alternative truth, he gripped the edges of his earlier beloved apparel. He folded it neatly into his closet, along with the other large and extra-large belongings. He pulled at the sides of the tight fruit T-shirt and clasped his girlfriend’s hand as they walked together towards downtown. She brushed the dust on the shirt off his shoulders and leaned over to whisper into his ear as they walked together: “You look so sexy when you wear this. I know exactly what I’m going to do to you when we get home.”

Trans bodies, he sighed. They were not our own.



Artwork by J. Drew

J. Drew, who writes under a pen name, is a transgender man from the American Southwest. Contact: <https://jdrewbooks.wordpress.com/>.

5 Poems by Hayden Corwin

On Resolve

Roadrunner dashes from
bush to bush to find
some respite.

But I'm not like the
roadrunner.

I come to you slow
on dog days,
not quick—
sweat dripping
off my brow—

easy goes this
cool-man lover
leaving smooth
cowboy boot prints
up your path.

Desert garden
cacti cut small
wounds that bleed
on dangerous flowers.

Adobe home
with ivy clinging to
the walls where
mesquite tree shadows
flutter at your door.

Continued on page 21



Hayden Corwin is a writer living in Phoenix, AZ. He was born with dirt in his eye and sand in his boots. His writings have appeared in Hominum Journal, the Daily Drunk Magazine, 433 Magazine, and Cobra Milk. He is currently seeking publication for his debut poetry collection, "Sin Organic."

You're sometimes
a slide projector
photograph
or a mean six shooter
late to draw.

Coyote pants
near rabbit bones,
wet red smile—
in and out
heatwave distortion.

You're a person met
with grief,
still asking questions.

Ferryman chips ice into the
mellow oasis pond,
beckoning me to dive.

I stand at your doorstep,
wiping my feet after
knocking.

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Western: Heatstroke

European starling pecks
holes in
dove eggs, and
tears apart the nest.

I bounce from foot to foot
as the yolk cooks
upon cement.

Blood runs between
my toes, dribbling off
the porch's edge.

Weak pulse slips between
my fingers.

I am the dust
that kicks up in
the evening,
that got in your
eye before
swallowing
you
whole.

I am the blame
you search for
that causes rain
after thunder
cracks the
sky.

I am the flagellating
pain stuck between
your flesh and
pricking at
your
bone.

I am forgiveness
within a
sweeter
memory
than any
that should
exist.

Continued on page 23

I am regret for
ever opening
your doors
again.

But I am
sorry

whether that is
helpful or
not.

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Finding you was

like the first sip from a glass Coca-Cola bottle

like a god who came back to me

like water for a dog

like nothing else.

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Arizona: 7th Ave.

Folklore cross staked
near busy intersection crossing
where foil pinwheels spin in
passing traffic wind—
translucent body laid
beneath crosswalk button,
Wait.

© 2024

Understanding Death

Paramedics wait by the lobby
elevator chatting amongst
themselves on an
urgent occasion.

Five floors above,
a crowd gathers as the
empty body stiffens in bed,

and in the stillness
after everyone is gone,
I find a quiet moment
to watch—

your soul
dances
in the lobby,
inches off
the ground,
and I can't
help but
smile
as I
recognize

a friend.

© 2024

4 Poems by Janet McMillan Rives

Jamie

January 18, 1947. Jamie's birthday. Eleven little friends for supper. Wonderful time!

Jamie's the
social butterfly
a best friend
to each little girl.
Will she preserve these values
the rest of her life?

© 2024

Louise

June 2, 1947. Planted after supper.

Later in life—who knows
when or where—I will carry
this picture:

a plot of land out back
beyond the pine trees
rows of vegetables—
carrots, beans, snap peas,
lettuce, broccoli, peppers.
Around the edge all manner
of color and form—
zinnias, asters, petunias,
snapdragons, calendulas.

This house may be rented
but I own the garden.

© 2024

Preface: My mother, Louise Margaret Littlefield McMillan (1915-2006), was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. She married two days after graduating from the University of Arizona and then spent the next twenty-three years away from the Southwest, most of it in Storrs, Connecticut, where my father was a professor at the University of Connecticut. During the Connecticut years, my mother kept track of her daily activities by writing cryptic summaries in a “daily desk diary,” a 5 inch by 8 inch black spiral notebook. Upon my mother's death, I inherited a box of her diaries beginning with 1947 and continuing into the 1960s. Inspired by reading these diaries, I have written poems in my mother's voice, imagining what she may have been thinking beyond what she wrote. The short diary entries lend themselves to short poem forms, so I have written in three forms—shadorma, cinquaine, and tanka—as well as short free verse. Here are four poems, one of each form with each poem focusing on one member of our family of four. The epigraph of each poem is the actual diary entry, which served as my inspiration for the poem.



Janet McMillan Rives was born and raised in Connecticut and moved to Tucson as a teenager. After retiring as professor of economics from the University of Northern Iowa, she returned to Arizona and lives in Oro Valley. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Beyond Words*, *Lyrical Iowa*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Raw Art Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Crosswinds*, *Creosote* and *Canary*. She is the author of three poetry chapbooks: “Into This Sea of Green: Poems from the Prairie” (Finishing Line Press, 2020), “Washed by a Summer Rain: Poems from the Desert” (Kelsay Books, 2023), and “On Horsebarn Hill: Poems” (Kelsay Books, 2024). Her hybrid memoir, “Thread: A Memoir in Woven Poems” (Finishing Line Press), was published in 2024. <https://janetmrives.com>

Sam

*September 23, 1949. Received a letter today
from A.N. Jorgensen, President of the University:
Effective October 1, an adjustment of \$180
has been made to your annual salary.*

We are fed and clothed
safely sheltered in this house.
where I sit at ease
silent, proud of my husband
who offers us his kindness.

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Janet

*October 23, 1953. Janet went to her
first ballet lesson and loved it.*

Plier
sauter, jeté.
I love ballet
my tomboy daughter assures me
grinning.

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Shells, Hurricanes, and Prophecies

By Tommy Cheis

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Possum pancakes putrefied on 29 South from Carnestown through Everglades City, the hub for the nation's winter vegetables devastated by Hurricane Andrew thirty-plus years ago. I turned off Smallwood Drive at Chokoloskee Island, parked in my space, and swung supplies from my trunk onto my airboat. I launched southeast into calm, brackish water, passed waving sawgrass along the banks of the Lopez River, then plied into the snaking Crooked Creek.

Brilliant moonwash illuminated all. Aningas dried their wings from perches on thirsty melaleuca trees, prepping for the next dive after red mullet running the gauntlet of the narrow channel. Snapping turtles floated in red mangroves near shore, seeming casualties of the struggle to survive the Everglades but in truth alive and ready to ambush fellow turtles in their internecine war. Raccoons, eyes aglow, hid in the cover and concealment of bald cypress trees, reporting my movement along the territory to which they held title.

I headed east. Wind generated by the giant fan pushing my airboat blew away engine exhaust, seething gnats, and the ancient smell of organic decay hanging in clouds above the murky yellow-brown water. A half-hour into the trip, the Slow Speed sign appeared.

I turned south. After ten minutes, intense techno music penetrated my earmuffs. Good thing Harold wasn't just blind in one eye but near-deaf, too. I turned into Sunday Bay, a body of water shaped like an equilateral triangle fifteen hundred feet-per-side. There, where creek met bay, was the warm orange glow of Crazy Harold's Chickee Huts.

Four, linked by gangways, each the size of a two-car garage with a deck of sand-impregnated faux wooden slats, were set before a white sand beach fifteen feet wide and a hundred long. Barnacle-encrusted pilings sunk into the marl held them three

feet above water. Traditional Seminole chickee roofs of woven palm fronds kept away sun and rain, but otherwise the huts were open to the elements. Each had a ladder and cleats, a two-person hammock, and a can of bug spray.

Two pumps—one gas, one diesel—stood on the platform of the nearest hut. The next two were wrapped in thin nylon screens giving illusions of privacy to coupling campers, likely European and high on ecstasy. Their shadows, cast by battery lanterns like obscene finger puppets, tattled. I killed the engine and glided past the bacchanalia toward the last hut upon the deck of which sat, in a folding lawn chair with cup holders beside a plastic bait cooler with a portable radio and a .38 atop it, the oldest, ugliest man in the world.

Sort of. Harold Panther, my uncle and adoptive father, was ninety-three, and his appearance was the residue of heroism. A Chinese grenade tossed his way in Korea claimed his left eye and ear, half his tongue, and a third of his jawbone. Harold, who'd long-since sold his crate of medals for moonshine, fought on. He had to. He was a descendant of Seminoles interned as prisoners-of-war in a fortress at Egmont Key who escaped and found refuge in the deep Everglades.

Behind him, the deck was crowded. A port-a-potty no claustrophobe could use. A counter cum kitchen with a butane stove and cooking supplies. Another counter fashioned into a bar. Two standing racks of postcards, snacks, and tackle. Tied between beach and hut, *Wind*, the most powerful airboat in the world, lurked under a tarpaulin. Harold stopped giving rides the year before not because of advancing age but because he refused to get a license and insurance and name the U.S. Park Service his beneficiary. He supplemented his chickee hut income with snook he caught and sold in Everglades City and

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Tommy Cheis is a Chiricahua writer, medicine leader, veteran, and Cochise descendant. After traveling extensively through distant lands and meeting interesting people, he now resides in southeastern Arizona with his horses. His short stories (will) appear in *The Rumen*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Carpe Noctem*, *ZiN Daily*, *Spirits*, *Red Paint Review*, *Pictorial Journal*, *Little Fish*, and other publications. While his first novel, "Rare Earth," is under submission, he is at work on his second.

whiskey he distilled from sugarcane to sell to tourists. I tied off to a cleat at Harold's command hut, then swung the supply bag onto the deck. On the radio, KC and The Sunshine Band were urging listeners to get down tonight. "You still alive, Uncle?"

Shortly before I was born, my father, a descendant of Chiricahua interned in Pensacola who escaped, ran south into the river of grass, and lived with the Seminole for generations, harvested a panther for ceremonial purposes. The game warden took exception to the Native sovereignty defense and tried to arrest him. My father slugged the warden unconscious, then ran north. When the warden recovered he radioed his brethren. They arrived in droves. My father, a/k/a the man who raped my fourteen-year-old mother, killed the warden and eleven more law enforcement officers before they subdued him. The State of Florida fried him one week before my first birthday, 357 days after my mother, Harold's little sister, killed herself with barbiturates, vodka, and a razor in while leaning against a Key West palm tree.

I climbed the ladder.

Harold cracked his right eye open. The glass prosthetic was missing from the left socket. "Bout fuckin time," he growled. "Said somethin bout a fever dream a hurricanes n cain't wait, eh?" At least that's what I think he said. His speech was slurred by deformity and home brew and overwhelmed by rutting noises emanating from Huts 2 and 3. I gave him a hug. He smelled like milk curdling. After he patted my back the ritual four times, I unloaded groceries and ammunition, then helped him into his little tent and out of his traditional Seminole patchwork jacket of many colors.

"Guess ya tired now," he said. "Ya mist ma cabbage n grilled gar. See if ya cain't remember ya dream til mornin."

I unrolled a sleeping bag and feigned sleep.

* * *

It was early morning but heat already shimmered off the water like ghosts dancing on a grill. Osprey were up, patrolling the bay for fish. Egrets plucked grass shrimp from the muck. The campers had checked out and paddled their kayaks northeast toward the Ten Thousand Islands.

After a quick breakfast of eggs, Cuban bread, and coffee, during which Harold complained about improperly disposed condoms, beer cans, and the government, he baited a lure and tossed it in an arc into the bay. Miniature tsunamis rolled to shore and died on the beach. Twenty minutes and no bites later, Harold spoke. "Good timin. Hurricane comin."

"I didn't hear anything on the weather report. Ancient Seminole practice tells you so?"

"Ya problem, Jimmy," he said, rising and shuffling down the deck, "is ya uneducated."

"Says the man who quit school after third grade."

"Helpin my folks eke out a livin. Great Depression was a bitch. Can't learn nothin useful in no fancy school. Come on." I followed him to the far platform atop which was a hemispherical structure tall as a man's chest built from interwoven tree branches and palm fronts, covered in a cloth tarpaulin, with a flap facing east. He crawled in. I crawled after him. The air was 140 degrees.

Harold sat me in the west. He sat in the east, closed the flap, breathed deep, then sang. I knew the song. By the time we finished our hearts beat as one. "He three weeks out," Harold said. "Biggest hurricane ever. Bout time ya learned bout storms. In tha beginnin," he said, in a voice younger and older than he was, "afore mankind, Panther sat beside Creator. First in all creation. He was majestic. N beautiful. N patient. N strong."

He let his words hang and echo. My heart opened. I saw Panther, right inside the lodge, sitting beside Creator. Harold was gone. "Creator then made all the other animals," said a voice that was and wasn't Harold's. "Bear, Wolf, Eagle, Dolphin."

I had no concept of place. I floated. Creator was light warmth and love. All animals were there, arrayed in a perfect circle. Bear, Wolf, Eagle, Dolphin. Others I'd never seen nor heard of.

Creator put us inside a large conch shell and set that shell atop the tallest peak in the Chiricahua Mountains. Then atop the highest peak in the Dragoons. Then atop the highest peak in the Mogollons. Then Creator said when the timing was right the conch shell would open and we would all crawl out. Creator sealed up the shell and left, whispering, *I hope Panther is first to come out.*

Alongside the conch shell stood a great tree. As time passed, the tree grew so large its roots cracked the shell. Wind circled the crack, round and round the inside, so vigorously the crack enlarged. Wind reached down to help me, Jimmy Panther, exit the conch shell into light warmth and love. Creator said, *From this day forth, Wind will be brother to Panther. When Panther makes real medicine, Wind will be beside him.*

Wind picked up from the West. But when I looked that way, Harold sat in a portable deck chair fishing. When I looked to the far platform there was no lodge. "Something just happen, Uncle? You were talking about conch shells and wind and medicine."

"Nope. Ya ears full a corn? I ast bout ya dream, n ya don't say shit."

"Weren't we just in the lodge?"

Harold scrunched his face. "See one here, Jimbo?" Recognition dawned. "Oh shit."

"It's fine. I dozed off. Heat and dehydration."

"Nah. Ya went somewhere else. Last chance. Won't ask again. Best spill ya dream, eh?"

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That was our deal. I'd tell him my more sinister nightmares. He'd interpret them like an oracle, or at least the Seminole version of Freud. So I did. From sun to clouds. I thought he'd fallen asleep again. I'd decided to leave him in peace when my half-blind seer turned down Glenn Campbell, who was bragging about offers coming over the phone, and spoke. "Who all die?"

"The principal, the cops, and the bullies."

"Hmm. Nothin ta worry bout." Harold reeled in the lure, recast it, then settled into his chair.

"Wait. You said if I dreamed of drowning, it was the worst possible dream. Guaranteed death within a year, you said."

"Ya misrememberin. Ya fine, kid." He saw I wasn't convinced. He reddened. "Goddamn it, ya dreamt bout ya self. Mean others gone drown." He emphasized the point with his wide, flat-tanged, bone-handled swamp knife. "Evil Ones, boy. But ya fine." Scowling hard enough to strip paint, he dug through the ice in the cooler, then knocked a bottle-top off with his blade.

"Your rules are changing, Uncle. Just like the times."

"Nothin never changes. Everythin same it always was, eh? Only ya perspective alters, n only if ya get wisdom. Ya read a lot but time ya got smart. Need ta get married."

"Not interested."

"Wait. I forgot. Ya married already."

Harold was sliding into dementia. "What do you mean, Uncle?"

He waved his hand. "Ya childhood sweetheart. Susan. One ya kicked ten asses ta win."

"It was just a dream. We never dated. I haven't seen her since 1993."

"Cause ya chickenshit."

It wasn't just the sun that emblazoned my cheeks. "I didn't prove otherwise?"

"Beatin up bullies here n overseas don't take near tha courage ya need ta talk ta a girl what interest ya." I was twelve again. "Don't matter, Jimbo. She ya wife. Act like it ya wanna keep her. Girl like at rarer'n snow."

"How would you know? You never met her."

"Cause ya was too ashamed ta bring her ta the Glades ta see what poverty was, eh? Two a ya figure it out. Ya gotta son too. He almost a man. N a daughter. She sick. Ever show ya my armory?"

Uprooting him from his sanctuary to get him to a Miami gerontologist would be a feat worthy of Hercules. "Show me your guns next time, Uncle. I think we—"

"N 1935 tha Labor Day Hurrican smacked us good. Momma got us ta high groun but we lost everthin. Ya grandparents too."

"Then we need to be—"

"Careful," Harold interrupted, watching his bobbing lure. Ripples raced across the surface, disturbing dragonflies hard at work laying eggs. A breeze kicked up, shaving a slight edge off the heat. "Ain't good ta no one if ya ain't good ta ya self. Ya ain't, he kill ya n lie wit his momma, eh?"

"This son of mine? What's his name—Oedipus? Come on, old man."

"Is tha truth a both ya lives. Wouldn't a tole ya if ya ain't ast."

"I didn't ask."

"Wouldn't a tole ya if ya didn't need ta know."

"I have no such need. I'm orchestrating my life to be shot at the age of 103 by a jealous husband."

"Cain't beat prophecy."

"Fine. What's next? Corpses will rise from their graves and run through Miami speaking gibberish? Threatening faces will appear on the sun before it winks out over Captiva? Blood will dew the Everglades sawgrass? Susan's a fantasy. I don't and won't have children."

"Ya need death ta have life, Jimbo."

"Verbal tennis sucks, Uncle," I told the quintessential Native elder.

While I stewed, a troop of roseate spoonbills marched down the wet sand, pecking up a smorgasbord of insects, vegetation, and minnows. When they moved on, two ibis—the first birds to return post-hurricane—arrived to hunt crabs and crayfish. I gathered my things and shoved off wordlessly, regretting it long before I beached my airboat at Chokoloskee.

Puffy clouds were offshore. I bought a grilled mahi-mahi sandwich, washed it down with sweet tea while listening to a cicada serenade, then climbed back in my 911 and headed east on 41. The sun was high. Love bugs peppered the windshield while turkey vultures cut lazy circles in the sky. I cut south on 997, then picked up US 1 at Florida City. Three hours, seven bridges across seas painted in every hue of blue, and one traffic jam later, I boarded my houseboat at Stock Island Yacht Club just north of Key West.

I collapsed on my king bed before the sun died. Who knew if he'd be reborn besides Harold?

A Poem by Beth Liechti

Not My First Monsoon

A drop of rain or sweat
on my hot skin? Late day
surges to one hundred twelve
as shrieking erupts from above.
Thunder staggers across bone dry Sonoran
plains. Under pergola, I chill,
sipping a sangria, strawberry
bits, like my day, float without intent.

Feel-alike sand yet separate from stretches
of empty during a Kuwaiti desert deployment.
Here, dust devils swirl mesquite
beans to a pop-up performance.
Fallen purple blooms jitterbug
at will, flashing back to me, back on duty.
Trouble seems far ... until
stately red gums bend against a squall.

One, two, five great-tailed Grackles,
cawing black pierced with yellow
eyes, swoop the gusts and chase each other
out of sight same as endless convoys pushing north. I fill
up as rain scent hush hushes.
Glow streaks through clouds, prelude
to the frenzy scraping
fresh against my drift.

A glance of Heaven vanishes
too soon in the southwest valley and showers sell
out parched middle-east terrain.
A drop of rain? Monsoon lurches,
letting go a lively torrent.
Thirsty wild and me gape grateful.
Near miss. Uproar along with my past
stirs off towards the ol' west.



Courtesy of Beth Liechti

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Beth Liechti: Bareback, she spins her blood-red Arab stallion on his heels and bolts into a gallop across the plains, breasts heaving and wind ripping through her mane of tawny ringlets. Her laughter echoes off hazy, purple mountain peaks. West Valley Phoenix resident since 2020. Scribbler, seasoned editor, U.S. Army veteran (Cold War through Operation Iraqi Freedom). Her stories and poetry have been published in "Sisters in Arms: Lessons We've Learned" (anthology, Blue Dragon Press), "As You Were" (Military Experience and the Arts), "Line of Advance," "Mighty Pen Project Anthology," and the "Cactus Wren-dition."

Gun in the Glove Box

By Dane D. Yarter

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There is a gun in my glove box that is not mine. I have been staring at it for some time now, sitting atop the insurance papers and other documents that generally occupy the compartment, nestled in like it has always been there. My knowledge of guns is relatively vague, and while I would certainly recognize models and brands if they were said to me, I cannot tell you what this one is. Only that it is a black handgun with a squared top and a magazine in the grip. The gun rests there in its nest, a motionless object, yet I am too afraid to reach for it. Not for a fear of the item itself, as I have handled and fired a gun or two throughout my life. Moreover, I am afraid of the implication the item's presence signifies.

Someone put it there.

Someone, at some point in a rather large time frame, placed the gun in there. They could have done it yesterday, or it could have been there for months. But regardless, it means that at some point in time, unbeknownst to me, someone broke into my car, possibly even my garage, with the sole intention to deliberately place this gun in my glove box and nothing else.

I am afraid to reach for it. To take in my hand and inspect it. Because that is exactly what this unknown person must want me to do.

But at the same time, I cannot just leave it there. The gun demands to be plucked from the glove box. To be removed from the obviously foreign location and to be confronted. At the very least, I must know if it is loaded. So, with shaky resolve in my heart, I stretch my hand forward, grasp the grip, and remove the gun. There is a heavy weight to it, enough for the urge to drop it to roam the outer edge of my thoughts. But I keep my hands steady and remove the magazine from its slot. The clip slides out cleanly, almost too quickly, and I peek

inside.

It is empty.

But there is still the chamber. Setting aside the empty mag, I grasp the slide and try to drag it back. The force required eludes me for a couple of attempts, until at last it snaps back and a single bullet flies out of the chamber. Subconsciously I catch it in my hand, holding the cold metal tight in my palm. But I am unable to open my hand to look, even with the hard brass pushing into my skin. The gun in my glove box only had one bullet in it. A suspicious number, as there were really only two realities that could lead to such a state. Either the gun had been filled with an unknown number of rounds, as I am unsure how much the magazine might actually hold, and fired until only one remained, or someone deliberately placed one bullet in this gun with the intention to break into my car to put it inside my glove box.

Now, with the thing disarmed, I have some measure of power over it, despite my heart trying to say otherwise. But from here, what should I do? Should I tell someone? Make it known that I found a stranger's gun in my glove box? But what good would that do? Unless I were to tell a police officer? I suppose they could take it as evidence and locate the owner of the firearm, then question them on how it came to be where I found it. But what if, in some unforeseeable way, this got turned back around on me? Besides, the police buzzing around would just give me more to deal with than I like.

Perhaps ... Perhaps I can simply put it back? With the bullet removed, the gun only poses a threat as a blunt instrument. Hardly a unique trait. But then what? The gun will still be in my glove box. Surely it would not just disappear as soon as it was placed back inside. Still, I find myself sliding the magazine

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The author writes: "After graduating U of A with a degree in Creative Writing, I moved back to Mesa and began work on my first book, which is now finished and is looking to be published. I'm an aspiring author who intends to write for my whole life, and this short story will be my first published work, with more short and long form stories soon to come. I want to thank my Mom and Dad for all their love in raising me, and for their support in pursuing my passion, as well as my brother for sharing this journey in life with me." Contact the writer at daneyarter4@gmail.com.

back inside and placing the gun back in its nest all the same, letting it rest there as the mouth of the compartment hangs open, pointedly drawing the eye to its contents. But the pain in my hand reminds me. I still have the bullet to dispose of.

Stepping out from my car, I stride back inside my house, heading for the nearest garbage can in the kitchen. If I just throw it away, then it will leave with the waste, never to be seen again. But as I drop it in and watch it roll down between two wrappers and the remains of a past meal, I get the feeling that this is not enough. The bullet will still exist.

Quite rapidly I claw after the disappearing round, sinking my hand wrist deep into the waste and pawing about for it. Finally, I grasp it and rip it free. No, I cannot throw it out. That is not enough to destroy it. To erase it from my life. There is only one way to do that.

Without thinking, I rush back out to my garage and tear the gun away from its home. Swiftly, as I turn to head for the back door, I pull back the slide and return the round to the chamber. Pushing through the door, I take the gun in one hand and point right at the ground, down into the grass in the dirt, and I pull the trigger. The sudden sound of the gunshot dazes me, its loud burst pulling me out of the frenzy I had found myself in. What good does this do anyhow? While the bullet is gone, buried in

the dirt in a place I care not to search for, the casing still exists. But somehow this makes all the difference in my head, and I feel confident enough that I can throw out what remains of the shot.

I return to my car and put the now truly empty gun back in the glove box and push it closed. Already I want to rip it open again. To see if the gun has somehow vanished as soon as it left my sight, but I hold back. I will not force this check prematurely. I will hold off until I need to naturally open the glove box again and retrieve something from within.

So weeks go by as I go about my business, months even, and every time I enter that car I cannot help but stare. Stare right at the glove box, wondering if the gun is still inside, like I have become some toddler being messed with by their parents. I even find myself reaching for it at times, but I somehow resist, never once opening it solely to look at the gun. Finally though, the time does come where I must open the glove box so that I may replace the insurance papers with their updated copies. Nervously, and quite eagerly all the same, I pull back the handle, and let the door fall open.

Inside, the nest is empty, the way it should have been those many months ago. I shift around to double check, but I am sure. The gun is gone.

Somehow, its absence is more unsettling than its presence.

The Fall

By Mark Wolfson

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The sky above the wood is the color of ash from a dead fire. I glide through the crystalline forest, the evergreens frozen to the consistency of blown glass. Small branches tinkle and shatter with each touch of my shoulder as I bob between the firs, effortlessly dodging deadly tree-wells and stumps. With each turn, my skis toss granular snow skyward into sparkling clouds that chase behind me on the icy breath of the mountain. Once out of the trees I float down the hill, my body alternately stressed and unstressed like syllables of Elizabethan poetry. Alone and enchanted I inscribe a sinuous legacy of my presence upon the face of the slope.

I look back upon my path and the mountain peers down at me with eyes of shadowed caves and a mouth toothed with jagged granite spires. I shiver under its gaze, for like the cancer growing within me, my passage has wrought an ugly scar on its immortal mien.

I continue my dance through the bottomless snow, realizing my quest for closure cannot be hidden from the entity upon

whose body I am but a mote. I jerk forward, as an angry hand in the form of a gnarled root grasps the tip of my left ski. I tumble into frigid white deepness, my motion no longer poetic. My knee, once a precision instrument tuned to the cadence of the terrain, now crumpled and useless.

Buried, I cannot tell if my eyes are open or closed, as if my sensorium has merged with the ashen sky. The mountain has hold of my knee in its icy grip and any movement takes the pain beyond conscious endurance. But pain and I have become intimate. With stillness, I regain my awareness and recall memories of being trapped in that putrid green tiled forest of intravenous trees with hanging bags of hemlock and needles of steel rather than pine. Having once escaped, I'd sworn never to return; the cost of extra days, intolerable.

Joy snuffs the agony of my senses as I realize my quest is at an end. Pain, my unwelcome lover these past months is leaving me. My breathing becomes rapid as the pocket of air around my head depletes of oxygen, but the scent of pine remains.



Mark Wolfson is retired from the practice of Internal medicine in Tucson, Arizona. He was the past chairman of the department of medicine and director of hyperbaric medicine at Tucson Medical Center. He is a nature photographer, writer and promoter of the Tucson Reptile & Amphibian Show & Sale. He has been published in the medical literature, herpetological literature and mainstream periodicals. He has written two novels and has his fingers perpetually crossed.

Pizza Do: The Way of the Pizza

By Mark Wolfson

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The kid eased the old VW along the undulating road with the deliberateness of a python swallowing a mouse. He was thinking more about the term paper for his kinesiology class than delivering pizzas. Turning up a long cypress lined driveway, he reached out the window with his left hand to check on the red and blue Dominos sign that flickered on the roof.

The kid liked delivering pizzas. He didn't resent working nights to pay for college, the hours of driving allowed him to think through his class work. He'd write papers in his head then scramble to type them up when he got off at 10 PM.

He used the outside handle to open the door, the inside latch hadn't worked in a year, and he slid from the seat, a quartette of Domino's finest pirouetting on his right hand.

He loped over a prone figure in a red Izod shirt that lay between him and the pillar encrusted fraternity house. Flies were treating the guy like a corpse, but the kid could see the subtle movement of his breathing. He approached the Greekly endowed front door faster than his normal appearing gait should have carried him. Studying the entryway for a moment he shook his head and grinned. Taking an ivory mallet from a hook he rapped the center of a two-foot gong that was sitting by the door in an ornately carved teak frame. The sound resonated with the pizza boxes and they vibrated in his grip; even the corpse by the fountain began to stir.

The door swung inward and out oozed a rainbow of Polo shirts and designer jeans.

"Pies are here," said a pastel Green Shirt who stumbled toward him. The kid side-stepped to avoid the atomized Jack Daniels that issued from Green Shirt's mouth. A Pink Shirt and an Orange Shirt rushed over to keep Green from falling, their eyes scrunching in unison at the kid.

"That'll be sixty-one, twenty," he said, flashing his best big

tip smile.

A Black Shirt and the Red Shirt that had been passed out in the driveway shuffled forward and yanked the stack of boxes from the kid. The top box flew open and a double cheese, sausage, pineapple, and olives did a complex maneuver, like an Olympic diver, on its way to the marble tile. The kid's face lengthened as his eyes followed the doomed pizza to the floor, then snapped back to the gang of primary colors.

"Sixty-one, twenty," he said as he looked from face to face.

Orange Shirt stepped forward, pulling a snakeskin wallet out of his hip pocket, but Black, who was holding the three remaining boxes, put his hand on Orange's wrist and sneered.

"Dude," said Black Shirt. "These pies are cold," he shifted his bloodshot eyes to the mess on the floor, "and you screwed that one up. We're not paying you a cent."

"Fine," said the kid and he snatched the boxes out of Black's grip.

"Hey," yelled Black Shirt and he lunged for the kid.

The kid slid smoothly forward and to the inside of Black's ataxic punch and jabbed the corner of a pizza box into his forehead. Black Shirt dropped to the tile like a dropped sack of fraternity laundry. Green Shirt and Red Shirt came at the kid from each side. The kid flung a super combo in Frisbee fashion, the sharp cardboard slicing into Red's right jugular. Blood mixed with marinara formed an ephemeral pink cloud between them and Red stumbled backward gurgling and holding a hand to his neck. Using a backhanded twist at the elbow the kid snapped the vegetarian supreme into Green Shirts jaw, precisely striking the marginal mandibular branch of the facial nerve. Green sank to the ground, mouth open, but his now paralyzed jaw would only produce a raspy squeak.

The kid stood tall, surveyed the scene. The rest of the shirts were fleeing into the house. And it was a good thing, for he was out of pizzas.

Graveyard Shift

By Duann Black

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Working the night shift, commonly called the graveyard shift, at the remains of the Egyptian temple was not the best job I ever had, but it was the most interesting. I kept that job for twenty years because it provided a story to tell my children every morning. They grew up learning about Cleopatra, Mark Antony, King Tut, Ramses I & II, and many other notable figures from Egyptian history.

You see, when the graveyard clock struck midnight, they all came to share their tales with me. They filled in the blanks lost to the sands of time. For example, stories of forbidden sex, what it felt like to be treated like a god among the people, how much it cost to build one pyramid, who really started each

war, and how Egypt felt about the arrogant Romans. I was privileged to have a behind-the-scenes ground floor seat to history that no one before me ever had and no one will again.

The last night I worked, they swore they would never speak again. I asked if I could be allowed the privilege of telling their stories. All but Cleo approved. She declined, saying it was improper for her bedroom affairs to be shared with any generation. I agreed and will take her secrets to my grave.

Working at that graveyard was the best job I ever had. It made me the wildly successful storyteller I am today.

Do you believe me?



Duann Black is an author and poet with stories to tell and things to say. During a multi-year break from emptying ink pens onto paper, she was the chief editor for her husband, Alan Black. They published 20 books, including "Metal Boxes" and "A Planet with No Name." The author is currently working on a two-book collection of short stories she and Alan wrote. She is a well-traveled military retiree, always ready with a story to share.

Here Kitty, Kitty

By Duann Black

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“Here, kitty, kitty. Here, kitty, kitty. Come to mama, kitty, kitty.”

“Are you crazy? Why would you say that?”

“Because we’re looking for a new cat at a cat shelter and the cat that comes when I call should be the smartest one, so it’s the one we’ll adopt. That doesn’t sound crazy to me, it makes sense to me. What is your problem with my logic?”

“Look, see how many cats are coming our way. How do you choose from the herd?”

“Oops. Guess I didn’t think about a shelter full of smarty cats. That one over there looks angry. Do you think that’s true?”

“The calico with one ear chewed off?”

“That one, yes, it’s stomping toward us like a bull elephant demanding its next steroid pill.”

“Huh? Sometimes you say the oddest things. Where do you come up with this stuff?”

“You’re asking me that inside a cat shelter? I get silly story ideas everywhere I go. Why should this place be any different?”

“Watch out, that tabby looks like it’s about to pounce. That snarl sounds serious.”

She reached out slowly with the back of her hand toward the snarling tabby. The tabby leaped past the hand directly into the alien’s face.

Out of Gas

By Duann Black

© 2024

I smiled as I walked to the gas station. By the time I opened the door, I was chuckling. I approached the teenager behind the counter, who gave me an odd look.

“Can I help you, Ma’am?” He asked.

Swallowing my next chuckle, I noted his name embroidered on his work shirt. “How’s your day going, Matt?” I asked.

“Slow, but it’s been okay. How’s your day, Ma’am?”

I stifled a laugh. “Typical day, I suppose. Now and then, variety needs to jump up and smack me in the face. Today is that day.”

The young man’s expression turned from confusion to concern.

“Let me be more specific, Matt. See that car parked off to the left along the meridian across the intersection?”

Matt backed away from me before turning to look out of the

store window. “That white Mercury? Is that yours?”

“Yep, that’s mine.” I laughed again. “I ran out of gas because I slowed down anticipating turning into your station to fill up my tank. That caused me to hit the traffic light red. While idling at the light, the engine sucked up the last two drops of go juice. I barely got it off the road before it sputtered to dead silence.”

“If you have a gas can, Ma’am I can fill it and explain how to prime the carburetor to get it started. That gas guzzler won’t use up a can full of gas before you drive it through the intersection to one of the pumps.”

“That would be most helpful, but I don’t have a gas can. In fact, to my surprise, I don’t have enough money to buy gas today. I came in to ask for a dollar’s worth of change so I can use the outside phone to call my husband to come with money, muscle, and know-how.” I handed him a crumpled dollar bill.

We're Not Alone

By Duann Black

© 2024

Suzie and Billy ran from the backdoor to the hay barn, using the garage and horse barn to cover their getaway.

Suzie said, "Hopefully, Aunt Jeanne will think we ran out the front door to the street."

Billy grabbed her hand to help her run faster. "It's not a street. It's a dirt road. And there aren't any trees or bushes to hide our escape if we went that way. I doubt Aunt Jeanne is dumb enough to think we'd run to a neighbor's house when we don't know any of her neighbors."

Dragging his younger sister along, Billy ran faster, looking back often to adjust their escape path, ensuring he could not see the backdoor to the house, the kitchen window, or his aunt.

The preteens finally made it to the old hay barn. Billy turned into the aisle along unused horse stalls.

"Why are we going down here? It smells. I don't want to go there." Suzie pulled her hand free.

Billy stopped. "I know it stinks of old horse manure, but I doubt Aunt Jeanne will find us here. She never goes to the barns. She's a housewife, not a farmhand."

Reluctantly, Suzie followed her brother deeper into the stables area. "How are we going to hide? How are we going to call Mom to come get us?"

Billy turned into an open stall. "I don't know. We had to do the first thing, get away." He found a corner with dry straw and helped his sister sit down. He joined her, hugging her.

"If we can stay hidden long enough, maybe I can get to a phone to call Mom." He said.

"Billy, I'm scared and it's stinky here."

"I know. There's nothing I can do about the smell. If we stay here until it gets dark, we'll have a better chance of getting away."

"Maybe Aunt Jeanne will drive away to chase us down on the road." Suzie grabbed a handful of t-shirt to cover her nose.

"It could be. We should be able to hear the car start if we sit quietly." Billy said.

Suzie jerked awake from a short, fitful nap.

Billie covered her mouth before she could speak. "We're not alone. Don't move. Keep your eyes closed." He hugged her, trying to comfort her as she shook with fear. "We'll be okay."

Space Rescue

By Kat Emmons

© 2024

“Duck.” Laser fire shattered the nearby rock. “Run.” Feet slammed against the dirt as the team dashed in and out of the rocky area trying to remain alive. “Where are they?” They barely heard this shouted question above a round of fire. “I don’t know, but if we don’t take that gun out soon ...” The sentence hung in the air perhaps because no one wanted to tempt fate by finishing it. Then again, running for your life takes a lot of focus and heavy breathing so maybe no one had the breath or energy to finish it.

“We need backup,” came the commander’s voice from a distance.

“Called in. The ship’s under heavy fire. No way to drop shields to beam us aboard, or reinforcements down.” Came a crewman’s response.

“Then we’re on our own. Whose got ideas about that gunner’s location?” yelled the commander from her momentary safety behind a boulder. Just as one of the crewmen was about to comment, a loud explosion rent the air, filling the sky with a huge fireball.

Flying through this blaze, directly at the cornered ground crew, was a small craft built for speed and maneuverability. “Yippie I o ki yay. Hey partners, can ya’ll use a ride?” The craft made a sharp u-turn to hover just above the fighters, now in flight for their lives.

“Well stranger, that all depends on where you are headed and what your intentions are.” The commander replied.

“Whoa. I always did like a little lady in charge.” The next round of laser fire just missed the small ship. “I’m heading to kick some ass so if ya’ll are coming we gotta go now while the goin’s good.”

“If by kicking some ass, you mean to help us get our ship back, we are with you. Not to mention we really need a ride.”

With the commander’s consent, the transporter rings descended around the crew who found themselves on the craft just as the next round of fire demolished what had been the crew’s haven.

“Yee haw,” shouted the flier as his hands flew across the control panel to slam the button to take them into light speed. With a half turn, he greeted his guests with a big old grin stating, “Howdy ya’ll. Welcome to my bunkhouse. Are ya ready to go catch us some outlaws?”

Not waiting for a reply, still going at light speed, he circled around, dropped speed to come up behind the gunner, and took them out before they realized what had occurred.

“Now ya’ll might want to find a way to brace yourselves as things are a goin’ be rough riding for a while.” As he spoke, the cowboy eyed the battle going on between the two larger ships, and jumped back to light speed with his calculation made. “Now is when you’ll be wanting to contact your ship and ask them not to fire on me, but work with me.” So, saying, he opened a hailing unit as the commander moved up behind him.

“Topaz. This is Commander Pandora. The crew and I are off the surface traveling with ... I don’t know his name but he talks like an old west earth cowboy. He just took down the gunner that had been firing on us and he needs you to help take out the ship you are currently engaged in a firefight with. “I order you to follow his lead in this.”

“Topaz here. Captain Black speaking. Aye. Aye, commander.”

“Mr. Cowboy, what are your orders.?” A hardy laugh greeted Captain Black as the spacecraft owner responded.

“Mister, is it? An’ orders? Why isn’t that special. So, here’s the way this rodeo is goin’ down.” Cowboy barked out directions as he proceeded to once again maneuver his ship,

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Kat wrote her first short stories in high school and her first poems in college. Over the years she took part in various writing groups. However, it was the writing groups hosted by the Dog Eared Pages Book Store and the many wonderful participants who became friends and writing peers that brought about her first published short stories in the anthology titled “Flashes of Light on a Dark and Stormy Night.”

coming up behind an asteroid positioned just behind the enemy's battle cruiser.

"Alrightie, Captain Black, I'm in place. Remember, as you see the asteroid crash into the cruiser, you take your ship up high and fast. You need to go up, as I will be using my tractor beam below the asteroid to carry it into the cruiser."

Communication ended as the small ship dropped below the asteroid, trapping it with its strong tractor ray, and began the race full speed ahead for the battle cruiser. "Everyone hang on," yelled Cowboy. "Impact in five, four, three, two, one." The small craft shook so hard everyone, well except Cowboy, was sure the thing would come apart before it could successfully drive the asteroid even halfway through the battle cruiser.

True to orders the Topaz headed up and out of the way as the impact on the cruiser began so it was safely clear of the space before the explosion. Cowboy detached the tractor beam as soon as the asteroid hit the battle cruiser's engine room. He hit the light speed button and was totally out of the area when the enemy's ship went up in flames.

Turning to his guests he smiled saying "Well I recon we'd best be gettin' ya'll home." With the same ease he flew during the battle, he returned to the crew's mother ship.

"Captain Black of the Topaz, I have a gang of people here that would sure like to come home. Can you accommodate?"

"Yes sir, Mr. Cowboy, the transporter is locked onto our crew and we await our commander's orders."

"Stand by Captain Black." Ordered the commander.

"Mr. Cowboy, may we know who you are?" She asked.

Bowing slightly while flashing his usual grin, the cowboy lifted his ten-gallon western hat in greeting and using his friendliest voice answered "Why certainly, little lady. I'm the Lone Cowboy."

"Captain Black, if you'd be so kind to beam my guests over, I'd be grateful."

The crew of the Topaz once again found themselves on their own ship before the commander could relay the order to beam them over.

As the commander entered the bridge, Captain Black and the others saluted. Looking around at the shit-eating grins on the faces of her crew she asked "Ok what gives here? Who on earth or should I say in space is the Lone Cowboy?"

Captain Black spoke up. "Sir I think we all thought he was a myth until today, but the story goes that he was in a similar predicament as you and the crew and was the only one to make it out alive. It seems he swore that as long as he was alive, he would never let something like that happen to another. So, he has been riding through space for many years, saving lives wherever he can."

The next thing the crew heard was Cowboy's voice. "I trust ya'll made it aboard ok. All I ask in return is that if ya get a chance, pay it forward. Till we meet again, Happy Flying. Silver Bullet Pratol over and out." Then he was gone as suddenly as he had appeared in their lives.

Desert Museum Nostalgia

By Audrey Yossem

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There is a different smell when immersed in a city-less area. It is hard to describe without first-hand experience. Arizona has been my home, but when I left, I missed something and did not realize what it was until I entered the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. The smell of the desert has a particular innocence about it. Tie that smell in with the view and you are engulfed in an auspicious moment.

Many could describe this area as a true Arizonan local. There is a desert beyond what can be seen, as well as another stunning view of Saguaro National Park. Now that I am taller, I can view more than my childhood self. Being at the museum reminds me of home. Brings back the smell of fresh air that the city does not have. It also brings forth happiness to have the dirt crunch underfoot and the small swipe of the lingering plants on my pantlegs.

It is important for any Arizonan to visit the museum at least once in their lifetime. You feel wildly enveloped in the wildlife and plant species. The feeling of home holds me tight and makes me forget all my worries. I just enjoy the moment and wash away all my concerns.

Going to the museum as a child and then again as an adult is riveting because I have two separate memories to think back on now. The trails seem smaller, but the plants still seem like they could touch the sun if they wanted. The caves are more narrow but still filled with stalactites and the running water sounds like rain pelting the ground above.

Out of the caves, there is much to explore. They have every type of desert plant and cacti you can imagine. I walked upon the trails, the dirt and rocks crushing beneath my sneakers. The weather is perfect for hiking in the Arizona winter. While I

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A vast view from an observation perch at the entrance of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson on January 20, 2024. Courtesy of Audrey Yossem.

The author writes: "My name is Audrey Yossem, I am a graduate student at the University of Arizona and an Arizona native. I enjoy spending time outdoors and experiencing all the land has to offer. I am working on my Journalism degree and intend on writing for my future career. I currently reside in Tucson, but was born and raised in Bisbee, Arizona. I love my hometown, but I fit more in Tucson as the city provides me with greater opportunities. Thank you for reading!"



walked the path, I tried to stay clear of the trail's edge, as to not get pricked by a precariously placed cactus.

I passed by new plant life such as the Buckhorn Cholla and the Desert Globe Mallow. My childhood memories come to mind as I see the agave and the ocotillo, like the ones we used to have entangled in the fence of the house I grew up in. The view, oh the views. I practically ran to the end of the walkway of the entrance to get a glance at the desert. Miles and miles of beautiful land and the sight of the Saguaro National Park.

Walking past the snakes, Gila monsters, and other reptilian creatures is Cat Canyon. Perched right against the giant window is the majestic cat, the mountain lion. Such a gorgeous creature with not a care in the world but to lounge and watch passersby. I skipped further in and saw the ocelot with its tan brown fur and black speckled spots. I thought 'It is smaller than I imagined.'

Then came the fox who also was lounging on a perch that looks like it was made just for him.

Walking out of Cat Canyon, I saw the coyote and recalled, 'I see those all the time,' and here one manages to keep itself entertained in this small area.

The exit gates are an unwelcomed guest and I stopped to admire the iron animals they have decorated outside to accompany their tall trees. The javelina looks like it has been touched by so many with the iron color fading off its back.

I seem to catch myself in a shade of sadness of saying goodbye to the animals, the plants, and even the damp caves. When I get back to the car, I remember the winding road and the scenery on the trek back to my home and remember, 'Until next time.'

Our Touching Was a Burning Bush

By Michael A.L. Broyles

© 2024

The evening before my mother's funeral, I sat in the courtyard of Connor O'Malley's Pub drinking cider as I watched the rainbowlike sunset smother the mountainous horizon. I turned my thoughts to the pub's main claim to fame: the strange outdoor men's room hidden behind an agave-colored mesquite gate. The bathroom had a tall, manufactured waterfall feeding a drained trough, into which men relieved themselves. Overlooking the waterfall stood a white statue of a naked, five-winged seraph, his chiseled body in a urinating position. Just minutes prior, I had directed Cortina's husband Moises to the strange latrine. Cortina, on the other hand, resigned herself to the drab women's room inside, next to the indoor men's room.

I heard a thud behind me and turned to see a dirty, golden-haired cat chewing a freshly caught Mediterranean gecko. As I watched the kaleidoscopic lizard writhe in its predator's fangs, the reality of my mother's death reentered my mind. She would never breathe again, and I didn't feel sad about it. This is not a couth thing for a daughter to admit.

I took out and lit a cigarette. Moises returned and sat by his neat whiskey as I held my open pack in his direction.

"No thanks," he said. "I quit. And so did your cousin, if you can believe it."

"No way!" I responded. "I thought folks in the Air Force smoked for life."

"Well, not Cortina, apparently."

"What about me?" asked Cortina as she returned to her seat and sipped her freshly settled stout.

"I just never thought I'd see the day that you quit smoking," I said. "I figured that would betray your fellow airmen."

"No, that's if I quit drinking." Cortina winked and put her

glass in the air. Moises and I soon followed, clanking them together. She continued: "The smoking stereotype is more for the Marines. But my friend said that most new recruits have turned to that bubble-gum-smelling shit. What are they called?"

"Vapes," said Moises, matter-of-factly. Cortina rolled her eyes.

Growing bored with the subject, I pointed to Moises and asked, "Hey, is the pissing angel still in the men's bathroom?"

"Yeah. How do you know about that?"

"I've been in there."

"Yeah, she's been in there, all right," said Cortina as she pointed her thumb towards me. "Bloom told me that when she was in college, she got drunk one night and was pissed that the place had two bathrooms for men and only one for women, so she hosted a protest by... what did you do, Bloom?"

I'd actually been in there quite a few times, just because I found the interior so fascinatingly silly. Nonetheless, I knew which story Cortina was referencing. I both loved and hated my cousin for bringing up this story: loved because it distracted me from my mother's death, and hated because I, despite whatever braggadocious demeanor I take on when telling stories of my wild college years, had grown embarrassed by this one. I indulged her anyway. "I set up camp near the angel and pissed in front of all the horrified dudes in there. The owners were so mad they kicked me out for a month. They still let me in two weeks later. Just told me to behave."

All three of us burst into laughter. As the cacophony dissipated, an awkward, distressed look came upon Moises' face. "I'm sorry to hear about your mother," he said.

I grinned. "I'm not. She was a horrid woman. I'm sure

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Michael A.L. Broyles is an educator, writer, pianist, and record collector. He lives in the Sitgreaves National Forest. His previous publications include pieces in Canyon Voices, James Baldwin Review, The Daily Vault, Theology of Prince Gallery, U.K. Short Fiction, Journal of American Studies, and Journal of Religion and Film.

Cortina told you about her.”

“Only a bit,” he said.

“Well, let’s just say she’s the worst person I’ve ever known. Like, she used to call me a Jezebel when I was eight years old. And a demon child. Then, in high school, she would scream as loud as can be that I was the disobedient ‘harlot of Babylon’ every time I left the house to do something fun. I could go on and on about how cruel she was to me. I won’t, but I could.”

“Tell him what you called her,” said Cortina.

“What?”

“You know. The female....”

I flipped the ash off my cigarette into the tray. “Oh yeah. I used to call her the female Joseph Stalin. I mean, it’s funny. You laugh now. But it’s dark. I came up with it in college because, when I was a kid, she would make up things I did wrong just so she could deny me dinner. So, to me, that’s who she was. The female Joseph Stalin.”

“It didn’t help that she had a mustache,” said Cortina. I smacked my cousin on the shoulder and clarified, “My mother never went a week without waxing.” I paused. Repulsive memories flooded my brain. Memories of young me peeking around the bathroom wall, watching my mother wax her stupid lip, longing for a loving touch but receiving only insults and neglect. “Neither do I,” I continued. “It’s those Iberian genes—filtered through four centuries here in the desert, of course. And somehow my mother ended up with a German, rather than Spanish, maiden name. But at least I shave my mustache rather than wax. I don’t think I’d be able to stand seeing myself in the mirror waxing my lip like she did. It’s already bad enough that I look like her.”

Cortina rubbed her finger above my upper lip. “You know, I can feel some stubble right now,” she joked before turning to her husband. “Aunt Lucy hated me too, as you know. Not in the early days, before Bloom was born. Soon enough, though. But I could handle it. I wasn’t her daughter.” She turned back to me. “I assured Moises that neither of us would even go to the funeral if it wasn’t for your father still being alive. That we’re going in order to comfort him. Because I know you love your dad, and I love Uncle Mattie too.” She grabbed my hand. “That said, how are you feeling?”

I rested my head on my cousin’s shoulder. “Not sad, if that’s what you’re asking. Angry. I thought I had overcome this anger, but, after so many years of therapy, her sickness and death just brought it back. Especially after she left that voicemail guilt-tripping me for not visiting her while she was in chemo.” I felt a rising anxiety in my body, like lava flowing from my feet to my chest. Breathe, I reminded myself, just breathe. “It might’ve been better if I never came into town, but

I couldn’t do that to my dad. You know, I quit smoking, too. That is, until Dad told me about my mother’s diagnosis. And here I am again.” I felt myself calm down and took a deep, agonizing breath. “You know, I wish I could be sad. It would be easier. It would make more sense, but I don’t have it in me. I can’t find my sadness.”

I looked up to see the others’ reactions. Moises gave a sympathetic look while Cortina set her index finger erect on the table and stared at me with the wide-eyed intensity of a revolutionary. “The real question is not where we can find your sadness. It’s where we can find our waitress for another round.”

“I have a question for you, cuz,” I said during my third cider.

“Yes, my dear?”

“What happened between you and my mother?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I roughly know what happened between my mother and me. She hated me—God knows why—but she finally stopped talking to me when I got pregnant, and Pablo and I refused to get married. Look, he’s a great dude. And dad. We got along extraordinarily, which is why we ultimately decided to raise a child together. But he was just a friend. We weren’t in love. Still aren’t. She didn’t understand that. She said she was ashamed, and she stopped talking to me. But I’m wondering what happened between you and her. I mean, you always said she was different before I was born.”

“She was,” said Cortina. “When I was a kid, she was the fun-loving friend of my Uncle Mattie. You know, I moved in with Nonna and Nonno for a bit while my mom was in prison, and Uncle Mattie would bring her over often. We had the best time, believe it or not.”

“So, what happened between you two? Was it because of the women you dated?”

Cortina sat back and thought. “No...she didn’t know about them. I had to keep that on the Q.T. for my job back then, because of the whole Clinton thing. God, she would’ve hated me even more! But your mom—how can I explain it? She just got bitter gradually. Let’s see, you were born in 1983, right?”

“Yup.”

“She wasn’t that bad at that time, but by the late ’80s, forget about it. She passed the point of no return. Did you know that she wouldn’t let me play with you because I had tattoos?”

“No!” I looked at my arms, which themselves served as permanent canvases for a mixture of multicolored abstract art.

“Yeah, but Uncle Mattie stepped in and told her it’s fine. I can’t imagine the fight they had afterward. Christ, she got meaner with age.”

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“So, when did you cut ties with her?”

“I didn’t,” said Cortina. “I was still holding onto those childhood memories until she finally cut me off. It was when I was stationed in Italy, doing ground crew for the flights to and from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She hated that we sided with the Bosnians during that conflict, and she wanted me to desert. Me! When I told her, ‘No fucking way,’ she never talked to me again.”

Perplexed, Moises almost spoke but held back. I inferred this was a story his wife had never told him, so I urged him to talk.

“No,” he said. “It’s none of my business. Especially before a funeral.”

Cortina contorted her finger into the shape of a mustache and, this time, pressed it above her upper lip. Summoning her most booming dictator voice, she shouted, “Nobody talks about Joseph Stalin before his funeral!” I laughed and assured Moises I wouldn’t get angry.

“Well, it seems like having a prejudice against Bosnians would be...unusual for your mother.”

“I’m guessing it was more religious than ethnic,” I clarified.

Cortina nodded. “Aunt Lucy had little patience for anyone who did not share her religious beliefs. In fact, I once heard her describe Jewish people as ‘Christ-killers,’ but she said it emotionlessly, like she was merely relaying something she learned in school. With Muslims, her hatred was more visceral, marked by angry tirades. And this was before nine-eleven. I could never figure out why.”

“There’s a lot of things we don’t understand about my mother,” I added. “And I guess we never will. The biggest one for me is: I don’t understand how my mother could be so...as you put it many years ago, ‘kind and free-flowing’ then grow into such a bitter woman. Was it me? Was it my dad? Why did she hate me so much?”

Cortina finished her beer before motioning to the waitress for the check.

“You asked me this once after you got back in touch with me in college,” she responded. “Do you remember that? Well, I still have the same answer: I don’t know for sure, but I can only speculate.”

“Well, speculate with me, then!” I demanded. “Speculate with me! It’s the night before my mother’s funeral. I don’t want to be here, and I just want some goddamn answers!”

Cortina kissed me on the side of my head and matched my coarse tone with an uncharacteristically soft one. “Oh, my dear, dear cousin. Any speculation I have will only make it more painful, more uncertain for you. I understand that you couldn’t ask your dad when your mom was still alive, but maybe after some months he’ll be ready to tell you. Maybe not. I wouldn’t

get my hopes up. But, plain and simple, whatever I might think, I just don’t know. Seriously. I honestly don’t know why she hated you so much, and I’ll never forgive her for that. But in no way should you think it was your fault. There’s only one person to blame here, and it’s Lucy Di Valentino. The fault is your mother’s, not yours. Never think that.”

The check arrived and, as I went to hand the waitress my debit card, Cortina slapped it away. She gave the waitress her card before taking her phone out to order a ride to our hotel. It was only nine o’clock, but we had an early morning.

We sat in the front pew of Saint Gemma of Lucca Catholic Cathedral—a hazy, red-bricked structure attached to my old elementary school of the same name. My mother had held a decades-long volunteer position as a recess monitor there, which she started when I was a student. She quickly gained a reputation as the most misanthropic of all the recess monitors, which didn’t bode well for my ability to make friends, to say the least. Even as a young girl, I figured out that the real reason my mother volunteered was because she enjoyed the sense of authority it gave her, especially given how much she complained about how “lax” the actual teachers were.

There were precisely seven people in the cathedral before the funeral started, in addition to myself: Dad, Cortina, Moises, the organist, an altar boy, a priest, and my old fifth grade teacher, Sister Monica, whom I assumed was the only one who agreed to be the school representative. My family and I sat in front of an intricate wood sculpture of one of my father’s favorite saints, Kateri Tekakwitha, who was dressed in a traditional Mohawk tunic, her hands folded in prayer as her face looked upwards. The sculpture’s smooth finish betrayed the historical reality of her smallpox scars.

I kissed my dad on the cheek. “You ok, Dad?”

My dad—ever shy in the face of affection, even from his own daughter—blushed and nodded his head.

“Strange seeing Sister Monica here,” Cortina whispered into my ear. “She was my teacher. Strict lady, but always kind.”

“She was my teacher too,” I whispered back.

Cortina donned a Cheshire smile. “She’s been teaching so long, I wouldn’t be surprised if she taught the pope.”

As I snorted, I saw my cousin’s smile transform into a confused worry when she spotted something in her periphery. I turned to see what caught her eye: a man about my dad’s age, stocky with a bald head surrounded by a moat of dark hair on the sides and a prominent black mustache. I took immediate notice of his conservatively debonair outfit, which consisted of a neatly pressed white shirt, black tie, black khakis, and a light brown sports jacket. He seemed unsure about how to act in a

Catholic church, stumbling around before rushing into the back row.

Cortina leaned forward and shout-whispered across me to Dad: “Uncle, is that...”

“Not now,” he interrupted. Cortina sat back.

“Wait,” I said. “Who is that, Dad?”

“No one.”

“If he’s no one, why is he staying for the funeral?”

Dad looked unsure, but I persisted in staring at the stranger. He finally relented. “An old friend of your mother’s, from when I first met her.”

I turned sharply to look at him.

“An old friend of my mother’s? My mother didn’t have friends. What is he doing here?”

“He’s just an old friend. Leave it at that.”

“But, Dad...”

“Leave it!”

I turned to Cortina, hoping to get some answers, but she avoided my gaze. The organist started playing and everyone stood. As the funeral progressed, I half-heartedly went through the motions of a Catholic mass, as much as I could remember, but remained distracted by the strange man in the back.

Knowing that the funeral arrangements took a toll on Dad’s finances, Sister Monica used the cathedral’s scratch funds to buy sub sandwiches for the reception, served with ice cream and coffee. The reception was in the cathedral hall, which also functioned as a school cafeteria, theater, and multipurpose room. It had gray cement floors, off-white walls made of cheap, crumbly stucco, and a cement stage at the front. Inside, the school and cathedral staff stored movable folding tables and chairs. Cortina and Moises set up one table—enough to accommodate all attendees.

I felt discomfited being in that hall. It was where I ate lunch every day from kindergarten through eighth grade, where I had my first communion celebration, and where, at nineteen, I snuck away with a boy I met at a friend’s wedding reception and made out with him in the women’s bathroom. That hall had been so many things to me throughout my life, but that day it was a panopticon, through which all others present could see not just my seething anger, but, even more shamefully, my lack of sadness.

Dad wasn’t hungry, so he only drank coffee while the rest of us enjoyed food with our hot beverages. When he checked a text on his phone, his subtle smirk piqued my curiosity, but I didn’t say anything.

“Well, I’m going outside to have a smoke.” He turned to me. “I’ll be right back, honey.”

I desperately wanted to join him but didn’t want him to know

I started smoking again. It didn’t matter anyway. Soon after he left the building, I noticed that the harsh church coffee was giving me the runs. I excused myself to the women’s room. As I pushed open the door, the memory of that boy and I making out there made me giggle, and I chose the same stall. A few minutes later, I was discarding my paper hand towel when I heard my dad’s voice outside through a small window above. I stood on my toes and quietly opened it. Dad sounded like he was on the phone.

“Yeah, I’m on the side of the building. My daughter’s inside. You’re safe to come.”

I realized that Dad was talking to the strange man from the back of the cathedral, so I grabbed a few hand towels in case someone entered and I needed to pretend I was wiping away tears rather than eavesdropping. Then I rested my back against the wall as I listened to the strange man’s footsteps edge nearer and nearer.

“Hey, Mattie,” I heard him say.

“Welcome, Ghulam. As-salamu alaykum.”

I was first struck by the oddity that my father greeted him with a traditional Islamic salutation—especially surprising given my mother’s particular prejudice. Then I racked my brain to remember any instance in which my parents mentioned a man named Ghulam. Nothing came to mind.

I heard Ghulam laugh and say with a hopeful tone, “Just like the old days. Remember when I told you to stop greeting me like that, and you just did it more often. Used to crack me up. Made my parents laugh, too.”

“Yeah, I was quite the trickster back then,” said Dad. “But it’s good to see you. I didn’t know if you’d show up. I mean, I wouldn’t if I were you.”

“I appreciate you letting me know Lucy died and allowing me to come. In general, I appreciate you keeping me in the loop these past decades. Every time my sister went to her annual union convention, I knew she’d come back with some updates from you.”

“Maryam is a great electrician,” said my dad. “And a great person.”

They paused before I heard Ghulam’s voice turn from upbeat and bold to tepid and trembling. “I hope I don’t cause any problems with your daughter,” he said.

My ears perked even more.

“Her? She was curious, but she won’t ask me about you. At least not today. She may ask Cortina. I’m fine with Cortina telling her—she doesn’t know the whole story, anyway. And when she does ask me, I may just confirm what Cortina says. I don’t know if she needs to know everything.”

“So that was Cortina with you!” exclaimed Ghulam. “God, I haven’t seen her since she was a kid. She looks...grown up, of

course. And like she's doing well."

"She is," said Dad. "You and she have a lot in common, in fact. She was also in the Air Force."

Ghulam gave an interested hum.

"And your daughter...what's her name?"

"Bloom."

"Oh, named after..."

Then Ghulam's voice became two as he and Dad said in unison, "Lucy's nickname as a kid."

This was something my parents never told me, and something I wish I hadn't discovered. Hearing that I was named after her, albeit in a clandestine way, just re-emphasized the fact that I could never escape this woman, even as she lay lifeless and locked in her coffin.

Now invoking a sweet and concerned tone, Ghulam said, "Maryam told me Lucy didn't treat her well."

"Worse than that," Dad responded. "She was downright cruel to Bloom. And I didn't do enough to protect the poor girl. I tried my best, Ghulam, under those circumstances. You know, I used to sneak food into her room after Lucy denied her dinner. I couldn't divorce Lucy—not for religious reasons, at least from my perspective. But, back then, women got custody by default, and Lucy always kept her cruelty just shy of anything prosecutors would care about. I couldn't leave Bloom alone with her like that. I hope my daughter knows I tried my best. I worry that she doesn't."

I felt embarrassed as my dad revealed so much about me to this man I had never met—things that I didn't even know. I was shocked, too, by my dad's self-reflection here. He was always the soft, kind parent. I was always "daddy's little girl." But part of my therapy was coming to understand and accept that he was, in some ways, complicit with my mother's cruelty. I came through this realization, however difficult, with great love and affection for my dad, but that was the first time I realized that he thought the same.

"Your daughter," Ghulam responded, "has the same glow as Lucy. That same generous kindheartedness that I remember so fondly. Lucy apparently lost it along the way."

I looked in the mirror and rubbed my finger above my upper lip. I imagined an alternate universe where I was not ashamed to look like my mother, and where I could feel positively about this stranger's compliment.

I imagine that Dad was as uncomfortable with Ghulam's comparison as I was. He quickly changed the subject. "Let me ask you something," he said. "Do you still hate me? I mean, for what Lucy and I did to you. I asked Maryam this for decades, but she never really answered me."

"I did for years after Maryam gave me your letter," Ghulam responded. "I mean, years upon years. And about fifteen years

in, I gave it up. I mean, it would've been quite the legal battle if the baby survived. But to have learned about all that after so many years was a shock, to say the least. And, yeah, I hated you both. You were my best friend, Mattie, and Lucy was the love of my life. To have it all slip away was devastating. And then getting that note from you, it was all so unbearable."

"Lucy was the love of my life, too, back then," Dad added. "At least I thought she was. That is why I kept everything from you. A stupid decision, I know. But I didn't marry her out of jealousy. I did it out of opportunity. That was one of my gravest sins, I think. After the miscarriage, I comforted her as a lover rather than a friend. I saw it as my chance. But I didn't do it out of jealousy. I promise."

I then heard Ghulam's voice, so caring earlier in the conversation, turn into a bear growl. "Why, then? Look. I'm sorry. I thought I could do this. We are at the funeral of your wife. You were kind enough to invite me. I shouldn't be doing this. I lived a good life, Mattie. Without either of you! A meaningful one. I had a great career, and wonderful friends, and my own special kind-of relationship with Allah. Not the kind of spirituality my parents would've preferred, but I got over that quickly, as you may remember. And I've known some great women in my life. Women who I can honestly say I've been in love with. But not like our Lucy. Maybe it was because we were 'young and foolish,' like Tony Bennett says, but...you know how she was back then. She and I felt a love so enormous it ruptured the brotherhood between you and me. And when she put her hand in mine, our touching was a burning bush, a revelation."

Dad cleared his throat. "I know. I remember how she was. Look, I know we hurt you, beyond repair, but you didn't see who she became. Oh, what cruelty she would inflict on my poor Bloom because she was my daughter and not yours. She saw Bloom as a symbol of her regret. I regret what we did to you but not nearly as much as I regret what Bloom had to endure. Regardless, if you want to know the full story, I'll tell you. I never told Maryam the full story. Forty years and I never told Maryam. I'll tell you now."

"Well, tell it then!"

I agreed: Yes, tell it then!

"It was her parents. That's how all this started. I mean, you remember their reaction when they saw the images of those idiot students at the embassy in Tehran. They banned you from their household. It was ridiculous. Like you had anything to do with that. Lucy and I tried every argument under the sun. We even tried to explain that you are Pakistani, not Iranian, and Ahmadi, not Shia. Not that we were entirely accurate—we tried to remember your explanations. None of them worked.

And I know it hurt you when you weren't allowed in their house anymore, after they loved you for so many years. I swear to God, your family being Muslim didn't matter to Lucy at the time. Or to me. As much as I hated the fact that she loved you and not me, I never bought into that hatred, I swear. But the minute she told them she was pregnant, they asked who the father was. When she didn't answer, they knew it was you. They threatened to disown her if she ever saw you again."

I then heard my father cry. It was not a sweet cry, but a frightening one—frightening in a way I had never known him to be. He was not crying like a husband at the funeral of his wife, but like a murderer confessing to his crime of passion.

"That's when Lucy started to care that your family were Muslim. She could no longer sneak around with you. The thought of losing her family crushed her. I mean, who wouldn't be crushed by that at twenty-two? And she made the wrong choice. Forcing you out of her life was the wrong choice. Not telling you about the pregnancy and miscarriage was the wrong choice. She chose fear over love."

Ghulam gave a long sigh. "You know, it's always possible it wouldn't have worked out anyway," he said.

"It doesn't matter. Even if you and she divorced after seven years, it was still the wrong choice, because it was the one she

was guaranteed to regret. If her love was stronger—not more deeply felt, but stronger—she would've told her parents off and started a family with you, but she couldn't do it. And me? When I convinced Lucy to marry me, I thought I was acting out of love—told myself that for more than a decade. But I wasn't. I was acting out of possession. I wanted what you and she had so badly, and I saw her grief as my opportunity. It didn't even cross my naive mind that I could maybe have had it with someone else. But, ultimately, Lucy's regret over you was the specter that haunted our marriage. And my poor, sweet Bloom bore the brunt of it. My God, how we bear the burdens of our parents."

I felt a sudden pounding in my head as my stomach muscles spasmed. I began sobbing, snot dripping from my nose as I fell to the hard, cold floor, hands covering my ears so I wouldn't hear the rest. I scanned the bathroom in search of an angel but didn't find one. I quietly closed the window and blew my nose. I washed and dried my hands and face and exited the bathroom into the hall. Cortina, Moises, and Sister Monica sat at the table drinking coffee and talking. I walked towards Cortina and tapped her on the shoulder. My face must've been flush with devastation because she responded with a look of profound worry. She stood, gripped my arm, took me aside, and hugged me. I squeezed her tightly and whispered, "I found my sadness. Not for her death, but for her life. And mine."

3 Poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

Ah, Blissless Dogma

George Santayana on insight: *A philosopher who attains it is, for a moment, a poet; and a poet who turns his practiced and passionate imagination on the order of all things or on anything in the light of the whole, is for that moment a philosopher. . . .*¹

Elias Stokhastes dowses voices from an abandoned well in a desert:

Demodocus old, older
desiccated below him the Holy Vale
he sits atop the hill or mound or mountain of his mind

thinks and tries to remember
and as he remembers his heels dig
their stolid dance into the soft dust of clay

Heels search for a rock in the clay that will brace his feet
tune the dance
stiffen a rhythm of his back
and his spirit for the renewal of upward heave

Hephaestian ulcerous belch
fiery healing draws
from below the heavy cairns of his pasts and his futures

Stokhastes:

Take it as a post-sacerdotal trilemma
or the dapple-dawn-drawn landfill wherever and whatever
a devotion to ignorance gets you
from the tear-worn heights of a wheezing providence?

Continued on page 52

Richard Fenton Sederstrom's family moved to the Sonoran Desert of Arizona in 1954. They brought Richard along, for which he is still both appreciative and bewildered. The Sonoran Desert, for all of humanity's wounds and insults, remains a gift. Sederstrom's seventh book of poems, "Icarus Rising: Misadventures in Ascension," which occupies that desert from Tempe to Guaymas, appeared in 2020. A new book, "The Dun Box," which regards "The American Century" as a total of minus 21 days in 1945, is finally finished as much as our world will let be, and has been released.



There is heaven There is hell
There is void for heaven
Physical evidence fails to exist for hell
Physical evidence fails to exist for purgatory
Wake up on any morning
Face the belching ignition of traffic
Listen for the arid silence left behind by sacred life
shambled into provender

Void is evidentially existent as non-existence
dark mystery inflating space
from among sub-atomic particles
to galaxies and by mathematical inference
dimensions
maybe dimensions of dimensions
after so long and in such longing
while

a poet:

this spray and foam of dream
of how many indefinable existences are there
rooms and times
necessary predicates among sub-atomic particles
galaxies, and electron teased dimensions

notwithstanding the beauty of broken flowers
among the shards of juggled, tossed history
of story herself and her crafts and art

Psuedeus:

Take me
speaking of shards if you can find
any redeeming reason to do so
a vapor of nearly discrete particles
spread and flow under Lake Superior and into Wisconsin
and follow U.S. Route 2 to near Brule Lake

and then then becomes a ghost
of the vapor of the river itself and Francis'
soul spread wide
to contract again into the original flow
but out of all control save Fenton's wyrd gesture
spread out and in and out and in, undulating
until nowhere is not this river is not less than anywhere

Continued on page 53

Demodocus:

Richard you will have opened the pack-rattery of our apostasies

Discuss

the silence of echo as a sound of caves that we may stand above
pray into with healing despair of breath effort faith
none or all

fraying shadows fail like web in a fantasy of care part nightmare
binds loneliness to a heavy distance of the body
feet struggling against the soft clay that shivers from beneath our feet
the slice and slide of line between
ourselves and the weight of nothing save the root-bound tomb

To let go now drops nothing
the old poet opens words again to the ghosts of Ithaca lost
and will not let go of sounds that

Francis Fenton:

have put up with me for all that I can remember
of the four score years and ten that
I have lived and some clock time one way or other
and slipping in and out of the womb into time

why would I endure an eternity of *me*
another ghost of Socrates' quip
and regard it as heaven

I can hear an old echo that declares
“after all, you will be a *perfected version* of you” which has to be
a thing that is no longer me
Was never!

Was a *thing* of universal ages
a pre-primordial perfection of protons
that obliterates the *me* that far prefers obliteration
to which that ignorance may drift me away anyway

some poet:

I vastly prefer a thing that *is* still me a thing mind you
overcast and aside still mostly corporeal eventually
to loaf among the stars as a re-integrated
sub-atomic diminishment of ash

Continued on page 54

Were they here
and we enjoying together again meat torn from a tender
young pig hot off the spit
would Odysseus or would Eumaeus
regard death as a blessing

It's not death though and not dying
but netherlife that begrims
our futures but again
"Consider Tithonus" flesh in endless rot
caught in decaying eternity
It isn't death that's the problem

Demodocus:

The top of this wind-slick carapace of Terrapin Earth resides above
that accident of erosion
the cave carved by seasons of extinct spring flood and internal maelstrom
and the windings of the roots of a great olive
whose ancient story shades the old poet in his silent
cloud-borne mourning

The agon between a meandering wan spirit
and the unmovable change below
the cave the dug tomb the undertomb of anxiety
the undercroft of rising fire that

Stokhastes:

is the silence of echo that is a sound
of caves that we may stand above
pray into with healing despair of breath effort faith
none or all

It's finishing dying
the getting ready
layered against the pallid cold which the sloughing
caul of Tithonus' sere flesh cannot do
it's very like my idea of heaven having to put up with myself
for that four score years impossibly multiplied by numberless infinity

Pseudeus:

ah, but is that not invented zero concocted abstract
a void among voids
as undefined by the timeless disregarding and disagreeable
plural singular shade of Elohim

Continued on page 55

Francis Fenton:

I can't maintain a good reason yet for diminishing my years of living
which I do enjoy putting up with
in spite of the gray nature of the putter-upper

I would much rather non-exist as nothing but atoms
mute than balance a prop-room halo
a guilt of guilt for the rest of the long longing un-death
lorn in the celestial exurb

I:

shall disappear
some ragged student of the Dao of Lucretius
or from the bare pages of the Book of Bartleby
rather not unweave existence any other way

shall disappear some whenever soon
feeling just so well-fed on company
the wistless corps of the eighth circle of Where
waiting for silence to unravel in the book of Bartleby
to become the unshared noise of ourselves

Still I'd rather not unweave existence any other way but Vesuvian
illustrate that nothing is noiseless after all—
“O radiant”!
a cosmos of sound: the composed silence of the grotto lyre
the buried strings.

Demodocus:

The silence of echo is a sound of caves that we may stand above
pray into with healing despair of breath effort faith
none or all

fraying shadows fail like web in a fantasy of care part nightmare
binds loneliness to a heavy distance of the body
feet struggling against the soft clay that shivers from beneath our feet
the slice and slide of line between ourselves and the weight of nothing
save the root-bound tomb

To let go now drops nothing
The old poet opens words again to the ghosts of Ithaca lost
and will not let go

*

Continued on page 56

Demodocus breathes shadows in my direction

The same small voice *Richard*
here the ashes of Ithaca, of Tempe the breath shivers
to blend with your own
Your hand—

. . . Nevertheless, even if we grant that the philosopher, in his best moments, is a poet, we may suspect that the poet has his worst moments when he tries to be a philosopher, or rather, when he succeeds in being one.¹

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¹George Santayana, “Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, Goethe.” Oxford, 1910.

Bartleby in Other Worlds' Words

[The necessary condition of

apartness

keeps me close
and closed

together

in mutable cloud-bound arrangements,

stories

out from within my kaleidoscopic

pirouettes of brain-spate.

My core and scores of years,

my witness growing

as one and another

in one or another fluky voice

to witness in my shared days and ages
axial treasures of thought and spirit:

cultures—

thrush and flute songs:

the music!

and wars, yes,

treacheries far gone

and near, yes:

Castles, basilicas, laws of trebuchet
and bomb.

Permian, Cretaceous, Anthropocene.

Survivals . . .

Oh,

yes,

and the good of waiting,

like Eumaeus

keeping the table ready for twenty years

or ever:

Continued on page 58

we also serve . . .

and ever.

My shared life

longing for the company of friends
and comfort if not property
and fated instead

to apartness

and the failure
that is both Circe and Penelope

to the unrequited poet:

I am no Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Callinus.

My lyrics are bald, prosy, sans iamb
and god-helpless.

I st' sta m mer

t

toward . . . into

my own shadow

and avoid the epode

as I avoid finality,

which I would prefer . . .

yes . . . ?

or not

to . . .

note:

the sea

of the

shroud . . .]

the lawyer, anon.: "*A tingling shiver ran up my arm and down
my spine to my feet.*"

*Poetry then, is not poetical for being short-winded or incidental,
but, on the contrary, for being comprehensive and having range.* ²

—and for *being* contrary, concise within the range of its challenges.³

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²Santayana.

³rfs

Old Brothers

@3,300 yrs. apart

Santayana: 1863-1952

“I am an ignorant man,
almost a poet.”

Eumaeus: @13th C. bce

“To be a poet is to become
less than ignorant.”

trans. rfs

RFS: 1944-2024+?

The poet works his words
out of his ignorance

without leaving the appendix
of his ignorance behind.



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Who we are

All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a nonprofit organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We hold a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

We are all-volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of



all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about

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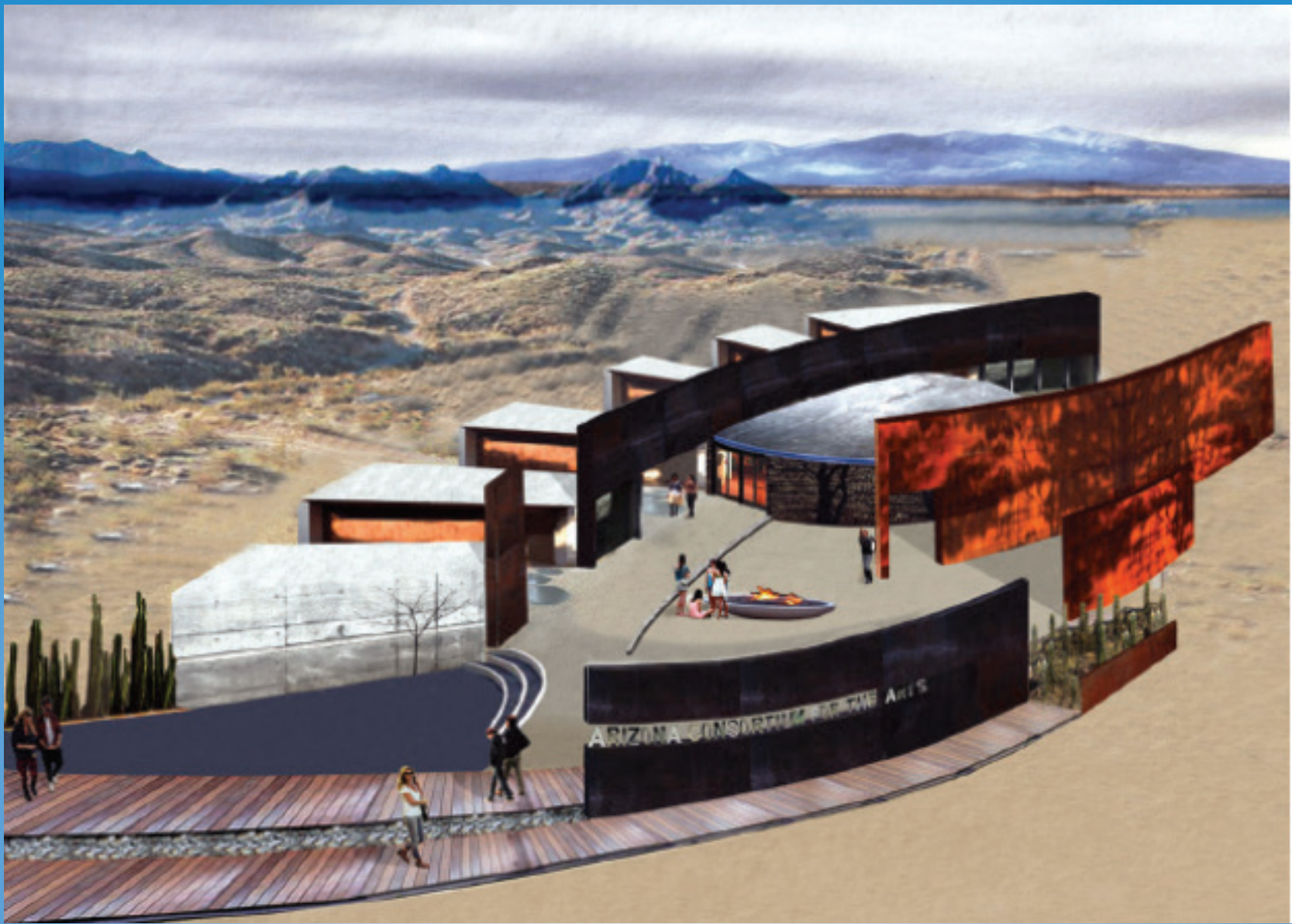
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed.

Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

Please visit our donations page, <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html>, and donate today!

Thank you for your support!



A rendering of the consortium's dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, building designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

The rendering of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, Building Designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The Center will be a source and a destination for creativity and inspiration. It will be a home for many wonderful community organizations, creative and innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary activities, classes and projects representing and celebrating our diverse community.

The Center will be a cultural icon in the Phoenix area.

The Center will be an inimitable foundation for a unique experience, one that you'll want to share with family, friends and community.

Designed by Effie Bouras, the Center will feature numerous spaces for the arts in all genres, performances and presentations. A flexible and variable seating performance theater for rehearsals, concerts, theatrical presentations, video art and films, lectures, meetings and recordings will be available free-of-charge or at a minimum cost.

Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



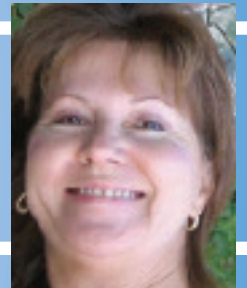
Elena Thornton, publisher: Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at info@artizona.org.

Rebecca Dyer, co-editor: A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher residing in Mesa with her husband, Rick, her Blue Guitar co-editor. Reach her at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

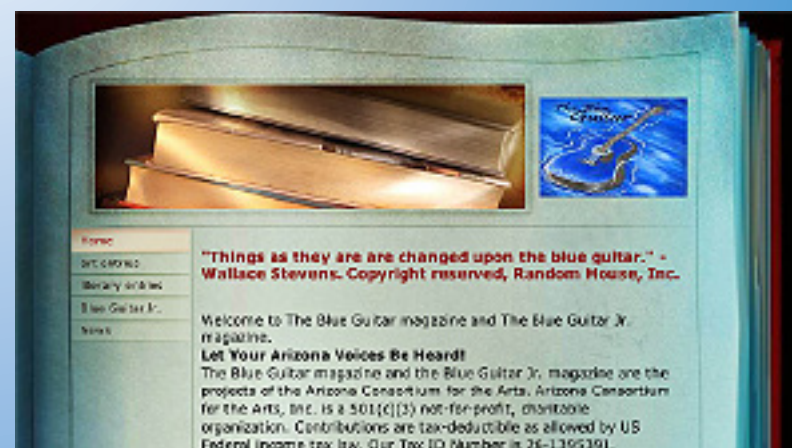
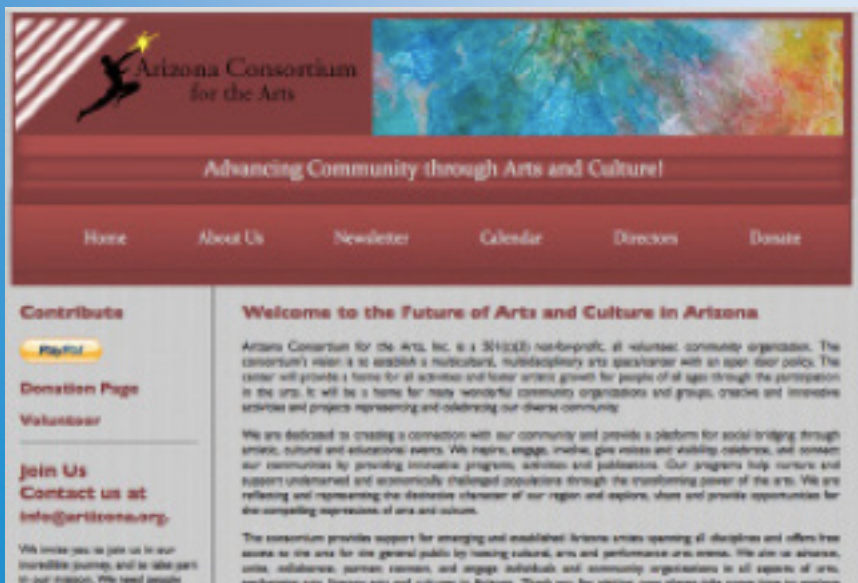


Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor: Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the managing editor of seven monthly newspapers and websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for The Blue Guitar: Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic-painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at mboyerart.com.



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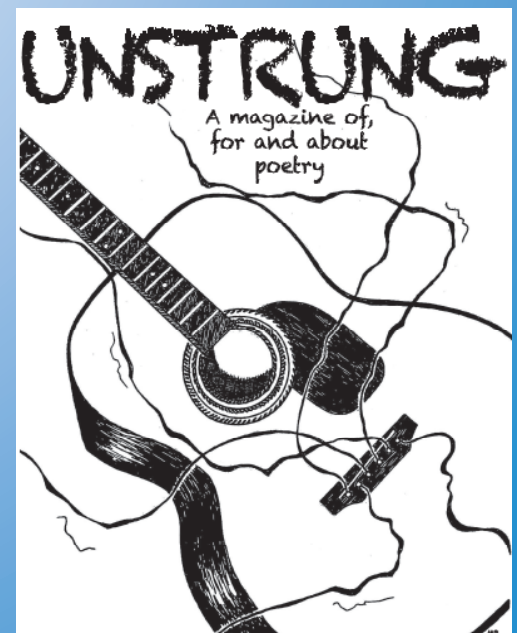
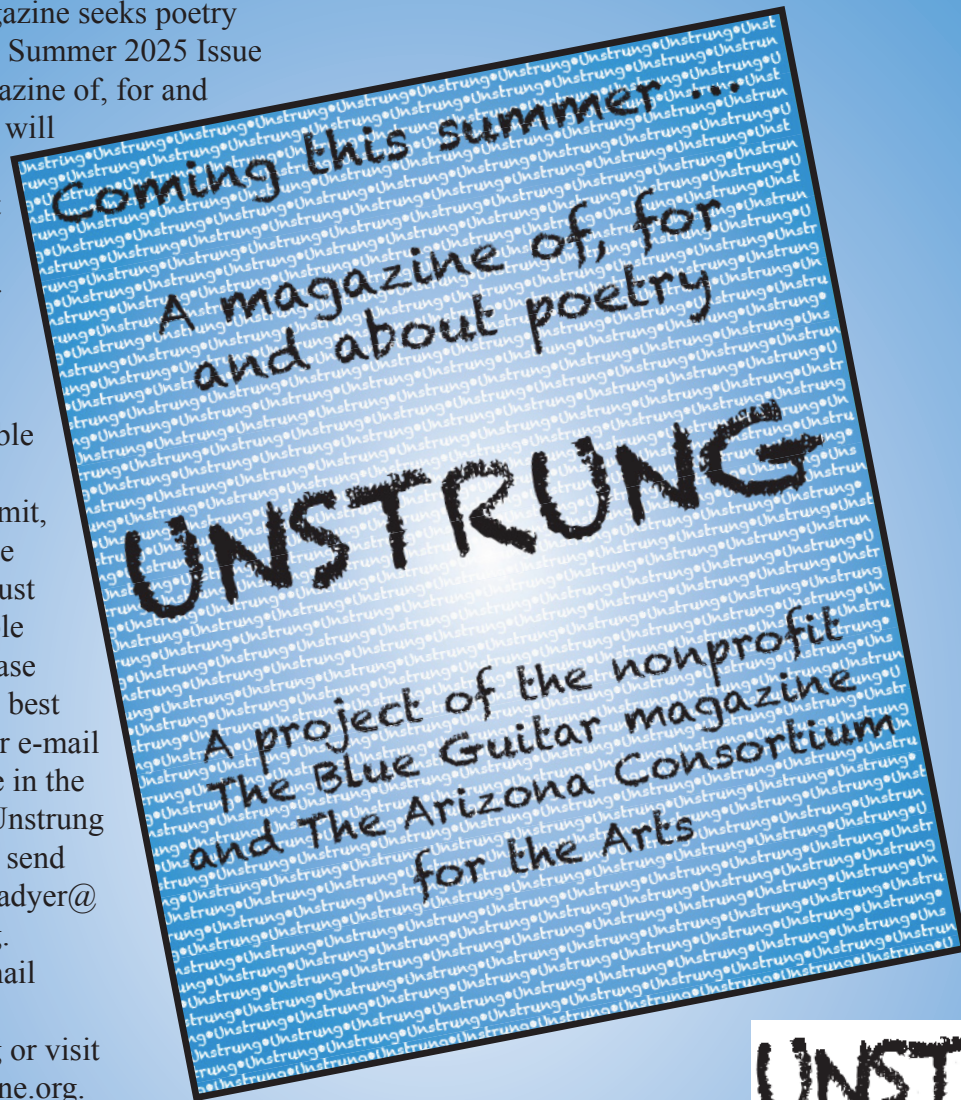
A Call to Poets for the 2025 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2025 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry. Submissions will

be accepted from June 1 through July 4. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, e-mail Rebecca at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, is a nonprofit project of The Blue Guitar magazine and the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about Unstrung magazine, The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:

www.theblueguitarmagazine.org
and www.artizona.org.



A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who write
and to adults who write
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2025, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona (no AI-generated works). Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who create art
and to adults who create art
for children and teens

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2025, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona (no AI-generated works). Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For additional information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:
www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

A Call to Writers for Spring 2025



The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Spring 2025 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work (no AI-generated works) and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.

A Call to Artists for Spring 2025

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Spring 2025 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 original images (no AI-generated works) can be submitted. Please submit images of work by e-mail and provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org.



The Blue Guitar magazine is a nonprofit project of the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org and www.artizona.org.

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar."

— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens' 1937 poem "The Man With the Blue Guitar."

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