

120F: In the Absence of Clouds

There was a time in my life
when there were no clouds.
For months the sky
was blue
 and blue
 and blue
 so blue
for so long
that when a single cloud
miraculously materialized,
water vapor transforming into droplets,
condensing, coalescing,
and rising, rising,
finally
high enough
above the saguaros
and palo verde,
my neighbor called and asked:
“Did you see the cloud?”
That single cloud, magnificent marshmallow,
an unexpected rockstar,
because in all the sky
after all that time
there was only that
 one
 small
 puff
 above
 our
 canyon

and yes
 I saw that cloud
and marveled at its appearance,
the sudden surreal white form
floating like a cartoon ghost
in the atmosphere above us,
and I celebrated
that cloud
because I knew too well
the hollow, searing
dry-mouthed passage
of months spent roaming
the fiery, crackling desert floor,
skin-sucked-dry of moisture
with the same relentless,
unrepentant
blue sky
spanning the horizon
every day after day after day
begging for shade
and shadows
in their absence.
And if you ask me—
no, I don’t think we’ll survive—
without shade, without water,
with the fires and floods,
the temperatures soaring,
the glaciers melting,
the bees dying—
no, we won’t survive it.
Who can live in a world
without clouds?

—Heidi Blankenship