

Archer

by Beate Sigriddaughter

She has always wanted to belong. Now
it looks like she does. Dad offers
a sip of his beer. She giggles, shakes
her head. Heartthrob Rogelio nods,
his dark eyes gleam with admiration. First
time he looks at her like that. Nobody
says the dread words, "for a girl."
The men offer to skin and gut
the deer. She ponders this, accepts.
She still feels the sinew of the bow,
her strong and steady arms, the whistle
and velocity of death. The wounded eyes
film over, lifeless, without accusation.
"Well done," someone says. She wants
to ask back: "Have you ever looked
into the eyes of a deer?" Their calm
and dark acceptance, shy round
innocence with just a hint of question.
And the bold nose. But no words come.
She is in a different league now.
Tomorrow she will be sixteen.
They promise her first taste
of the meat. She feels empty, silenced,
betrayed. No one explained triumph
would feel like this. She remembers
wide surprise in eyes so black that
they could make you weep. The finches
in the juniper have lost their charm.

