

Desert Becoming: a collection of poetry

By Jessie Kurak

Desert Becoming

If I'm still alive
I'm still becoming who I will be.
I'm still figuring out
this one, short life.
The planet is still spinning with me on it
whipping me around
under the phases of the moon.
41 years, or 54, or 63, or 72, or 87, or 95, or 106
just a baby, always, learning to walk on the ever-changing rocks,
trying to focus my eyes on the red rocks.
I want to wave back to the saguaros
and collect every stone I find.
I want to ask my simple questions
though I will not understand the answers, if they come.
I still cry, still sleep, still dream.
I just barely arrived here, and I'll leave too soon.
My infant skin still burns in the sun.
My small feet still trip on the roots of the palo verde and mesquite.
I'm still hungry every day.
I love the feel of the earth on my bare feet,
the look and smell and taste of flowers.
I want to touch the bees. I want to grab the cacti. I want to hug the rattlesnakes.
I want them to know that I love them before we leave.
I'm only here for such a very short while
and I'm still becoming.

Survival Dust

Some days are like this;
I don't want to get out of bed.
Sure, the sun is shining on the palo verde blossoms outside,
and I know the world is full of wonderful things
but I've perhaps seen enough of that, I think.
The only thing that keeps me going
on these days
is the thought that tomorrow
I might lift up my gaze from the concrete to the desert sky and
the sun might come through some clouds
that I haven't seen yet
in such a way
that only I will see
and the pink orange glitter color of that moment
won't have a name
I'll just have to hold onto the magic
for as long as I can until
even the dust of my bones
will be glitter in the sunlight
of some future setting September sun and
only I
will float there
with the memory.

Shadow

Walk out to the desert.
She will meet you there.
Your shadow will appear
by the ocotillo.
Sit down and wait.
When you see her
you will be afraid.
Don't run away.
She has something important to tell you.
She will scream everything you want to say.
Don't worry.
No one will hear in the desert.
You will feel ashamed of her. You will cry.
Your salty tears will dry quickly on your cheeks
in the desert sun.
Your lips will dry and crack as she wails.
Let them.
She will grab a stick and carve her rage into the dry dirt.
It's important you listen to her.
No one else will listen.
No one else can hear.
She only needs to be heard.
She is you.
She is you.

Time and Space

I am half-wild
Probably on my mother's side.
One bare foot in the desert clay mud
the other bare foot in a shoe,
and even those toes are cramped for space.
I've always been too big
for my age,
too loud and too quiet
at the same time.
I have been coming to the trees
with my willy-nilly hair
and my hands too clean
to listen to the creek and the birds
to be silent and ask them to tell me
What is life?
And today they did
or rather, I finally listened.
Life is this
Right here.
The sitting.
The water, the creek,
the dirt, wet and dry,
the trees changing colors as the clouds move over
the mountain
and here I am.
I'm not too big for the trees,
Even for my age.
I'm not too quiet for the birds,
not too loud for the creek
I want to tell myself back then
You will wander around the world and come back here
with worn out shoes
and here is the answer,
you've already found it
Right here.