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Back Before I wasTethered, I Saw the Desert

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Meghan Sterling

**BACK BEFORE I WAS TETHERED,
I SAW THE DESERT**

Through a windshield. How everything was thorn,
shoot and weed. How much like weeds we all had
been, blooming wherever we were planted. How
like the orange dirt, the desert heat rising like a vowel
out of the canyons in a great prayer for relief. The ocean
jutting out like a navy bone. That dingy palm tree green,
where brown and lime mate and sprout olive pits. Seed-
stalks and dust griming the backs of hands that dig into
the soil and plant poppies as if on a Kibbutz. A cactus
blooming its one red fruit. A forest of cacti like a family
that doesn't speak, that shoots needles if you get too close.
How we rescued a cactus, a buckthorn cholla, at our first
apartment. How it rewarded us by launching its spines
whenever we drew close. I used to think love was like that:
toxic leaves reaching from a dry and dusty pot. The shrub
restored and aching to poison. But the views were Zion.
Hills behind hills of burnt pasture. Gold with oat grass.
Enough to see the beauty in burning. How I wrote
my poems down to their stems, lit them with my blood.
How I flung their ashes into the Pacific and watched them
rise, dust becoming foam becoming wave. How it all disappears
again in the thirsty sand. How that thirst is never slaked.