



1964

The Desert

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I walk from the stilted, sun-baked house and turn to the right. Down the highway about three-hundred feet is the lone grocery store. The sand is hot on my bare feet. A beetle-that-stands-on-its-head eludes my stone.

Mom looked at the mountains. The sun was bright in the sky. Any minute I would hear her start talking about Dad and my other home.

I threw another stone.

She would tell me of snow and soft grass and trees that shot straight up for over a hundred feet. And how tall Dad was and what he looked like and why there was a war.

Mr. Rand was waiting with the block of ice. Mom and I carried the ice back to the house, using an ice clamp with two handles and put it in the cooler in the back room.

I went out the back door to the mesquite shrubs and threw pods at ants and beetles and stalked lizards. The tails would come off the lizards. It was a sensation to see them look right and then wrong.

I couldn't understand war.

When the sun was half-way gone behind the mountains, I would walk to a cactus, about a quarter mile away from the house, and sit down on the sand. A large group of mus-tangs would come and stand by the big four-lane highway. I couldn't tell how many, cause there were always more or less.

A big black would break away and walk carefully to the center of the highway. The rest stayed behind. He would wait for five minutes, listening and looking. When he was satisfied, he'd let out with a high-pitched cry that could be heard for miles on the cold desert air. The whole bunch would come running across the road and drink from the water tank at the train depot. But the big black would stand smack in the middle of the highway.

I pitched another pod at a big red ant and hit it.

After his herd was through drinking and back on the safe side of the road, he would walk real slow over to the tank and draw a long drink of water. When he was finished, he'd snort and wave his head and walk back across the road. He'd let out another cry and start running toward the mountains. I'd watch till all I could see was desert.

After the horses were gone, Mom would call me. She'd never call until after the horses were gone. I'd get up slow and walk back to our house. The way she looked made me feel like she'd been watching too.

Once, she had said the big black was fighting a war. That's why I watched night after night.

Jim Sadler

The Specialist

I pity the psychologist
who has no self,
the geologist who knows
only shelf from shelf,
and the meteorologist
who can't quite hear
because of the wind
that is in his ear,
Why do they know
only what they want to know,
like what happens
to melted snow,
Why can't they see
that they really are free
to be,
just to Be.

Bill Gilbert