

PEGGY SHUMAKER

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*Land Fraud Nosebleed*

We'd be out in the desert  
fifteen miles from Fort Huachuca  
checking out the latest

bogus development — street  
signs tilting into caliche,  
no water, no electricity,

just salesmen yapping  
like freshly groomed poodles  
and my strapped parents nodding

nodding but never talking,  
never signing, just polite  
till the Mexican cooks

opened the pit  
and FREE BBQ smoke  
watered our eyes and mouths.

Right then, on cue,  
my mother would glance over  
just as my nose flooded,

blots big as summer raindrops  
staining my crop top and shorts,  
and the salesmen running up

with Dixie cups of crushed  
ice, almost heaven  
if I didn't hold it

too long  
to the bridge  
of my nose . . .

Then plates of shredded  
beef and pinto beans, green  
chilies and white bread

appeared like mirages —  
plenty, enough, too much  
so we ate

what we could,  
said thanks, really  
foiled the rest

and balanced  
paper plates on  
bare knees

all the way, tissues  
mashed to my tilted-back  
face, getting away

with it,  
all the way  
home.

Saguaros tied up  
in surveyor's tape,  
cacti packing heat,

held their own seeds  
hostage on high,  
Apache tears packed buckshot tight.

The crackerbox trailer office got  
hailed off to the next patch  
of creosote and jumping cactus.

The dirt stayed. Trash  
hung around, blew off  
with dust devils, snagged

on barb wire. Before the heat  
of the day, uprooted Yaqui  
women whose third language

tasted metallic,  
sharp blades of English  
on the tongue, rose,

lifted saguaro ribs  
and ocotillo spikes  
to whap down

fruit out of reach.  
They picked up  
those strong enough

not to split, left behind  
those broken, bleeding  
into a new generation.