

Saguaro

By Brenda Hillman

Often visitors there, saddened
by lack of trees, go out
to a promontory.

Then, backed by the banded
sunset, the trail
of the Conquistadores,

the father puts on the camera,
the leather albatross,
and has the children

imitate saguaros. One
at a time they stand there smiling,
fingers up like the tines of a fork

while the stately saguaro
goes on being entered
by wrens, diseases, and sunlight.

The mother sits on a rock,
arms folded
across her breasts. To her

the cactus looks scared,
its needles
like hair in cartoons.

With its arms in preacher
or waltz position,
it gives the impression

of great effort
in every direction,
like the mother.

Thousands of these gray-green
cacti cross the valley:
nature repeating itself,

children repeating nature,
father repeating children
and mother watching.

Later, the children think
the cactus was moral,
had something to teach them,

some survival technique
or just regular beauty.
But what else could it do?

The only protection
against death
was to love solitude.

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Source: *Fortress* (Wesleyan University Press, 1989)