



Alli just showed me a recording of her and one of her friends Aaron reciting a Dine poem, rotating verse in English and Navajo. The illustration in the book that it is composed from has me feeling very nostalgic for the desert. The bumper stickers on dusty two door and four door trucks, dogs lapping their tongues in the dry sun exposed heat, cruising on 40mph truck beds. It was a beautiful poem.

Recently I sat with a friend whose mother is also from the desert. She says her favorite color, like mine, is brown. My friend and I went to Chaco Canyon, neither of us had ever been there before. We took a brief walk up one of the mesas near the campgrounds. The sun was near to going down, and the sky was beginning to resemble a soft dream. We sat on a ledge that had more than enough room for our simple bodies. We gathered in silence until one of us spoke softly, slowly exchanging a few words. We let the wind wrap itself around our physical dimensions. It hugged us warmly as if reminding us where we had come from. The wind communicated to us softly, though it implied its hidden powers. The wind is a being you can't see, an untamable spirit. As we sat on the ledge of the cliff we spoke to the wind with our own life force of wind in our lungs.

Then we started talking about the desert. How its desolation makes you hear so much. All the plants, animals, lichen, fungi.. how they grapple at the resisting earth like she is home to them, but they are also wanderers. The desert is not the type of mother who asks you "are you hungry? Do you want a snack?" She is the type of mother who says "If you're hungry, make yourself a snack." She's not harsh in the way of negligence, she teaches you how to survive. To carry an extra water bottle, because we're gonna get thirsty. The desert is misunderstood as a hot place. She's not always this way, snow can lurk on the ground adjacent to leaked puddles during the short days of the Southwest winter orbit. The sage brush and juniper bushes hold a long resounding smell. Anyone who drinks gin or smudges their home is familiar with the harsh comforting aromas of the vast mountain deserts. This brings one to realize, the desert, contrary to popular belief is the most colorful and majestic place. Be careful where you step as you gaze up at the sunset of oranges and purples, watch as you see your breath mist itself in front of the pink, blue and yellow cotton candy backdrop of any crisp sunrise. Listen as the owls muster the strength to remind us it's night, while the coyotes sing to each other war songs, and songs of play. But the senses don't stop in the desert, the heart becomes as vast as the land in front of you, only diverting when bluffs and mesas obstruct your view- all the while becoming an even more glorious one. The desert is the most alone you will ever feel, closest to freedom. The birthplace of humankind. The desert blooms flowers that no bird less daring than the hummingbird can pollinate. The humans aren't brave enough to veer from the strong pull of the desert soils, building their shelters of earth and painting them the same browns of the background. Sometimes painting them colors of the celebratory blossoms. They have found, like myself, wearing the colors of the turquoises make it possible to travel distances from home. The desert is not where someone can get lost, one can only be found. Speaking in tongues taught by the rocks, lichen, and cryptobiotic soil themselves. Please watch your step in the desert, because during the day the cactus are sleeping. Stomata close like eyelids, and what better place to close yours. I will die in the desert. This will be my resting place.

You don't just fall in love in the desert, you fall into madness. You escape the prison of confinement and break into a justified delusion. You burn your belongings and wear your soul on your sterling silver bracelets. You seep into euphoria within the desert, and your throat dries out. The altitude restricts your oxygen and you're left to take things one step at a time. But in the desert, you know how to exist. The ancient language is living, and all you have to do is sense it. That's why once the heart finds the desert, it always gets called back. Uttering words outload barely give it justice. If you can find an oasis of water in the desert, see growing green moss and sleep under a full moon and unclouded sky, you have found heaven. Being out in the mesas, in the mountains and even in the canyons and valleys-- one embarks on a journey to remember home, and once that fire ignites heaven is free to roam.

Alli knows this, Coco knows this. I love talking about the desert. I feel rich as chocolate mousse when it's the topic of conversation, but just like anything, it is fleeting. Joining someone in the desert is not as good as joining yourself in the desert. Words don't even begin, but I give thanks to the desert for her warming earth tones.