

The Years We Lived in the Desert

by Megan Merchant



Image: “Desert Road” by Ellen McCarthy. “The Years We Lived in the Desert” was written by Megan Merchant for *Rattle’s* Ekphrastic Challenge, May 2019, and selected as the Artist’s Choice.

I cooked without sugar, left the picture frames empty,
learned how to speak fluently about juniper,

elm, and pine to fill that dust-space. We married, deboned
fish on the back porch, drank wine

with fruits infused and I lied openly when you asked about
my dreams, what woke me shaking and soaked.

Vacancy is not an adequate splint for love. I was told to treasure
the red dust that grained in my hair and ears, the phantom

rain, the flat-earthers who gathered and measured the arc of sunset—
the shape of the world is as good of a religion as any,

but my god, have you heard the panged-song of coyotes, their
voice-wound loud, not afraid to tremble, not stomping

to smooth the cracks, or pausing in the open long enough
to pull the yucca spines from their skin.

The years we lived in the desert, I woke each day with a plan
to leave, drew maps of the land along the bottoms

of my feet, and practiced blurring into the infertility, not as an
art form, but as a relief.