

## Saguaro Cactus

Alex Sheriff

A lone Saguaro cactus stood for thousands of days and nights, enjoying the incremental changes in view as it grew. If there had been anything else around to notice it, it would have been noticed right away. Where everything was beige and brown, the Saguaro was green, and where everything sloped around rather gradually, the Saguaro was an awaited blip on a flat line.

The Saguaro was content with observing the sky, shadows, and slow wind erosion on rocks. Nothing ever happened twice, and memories of its first night were as clear as memories from when it was four feet tall, which is the exact height it had achieved at this point.

Until now the Saguaro had been satisfied in the passing of time, and the minute environmental changes that came with it. At exactly four feet tall and roughly fifty years of age, however, there was a change in its attitude.

It noticed something new. This new thing was not subtle. To the Saguaro's knowledge, the new thing carried itself differently than every other thing in the desert. It was brown-beige, like most things, but it was suspended and flapping. It moved in the air not only because of wind, but because it was flapping around on its own volition. This was a new concept to the cactus. It had never moved on its own.

The only moving the cactus had done was the completely involuntary act of growing. While the cactus was confined to creep slowly upward, the new thing moved in shapes that look like the outlines of continents or the right type of cloud. It moved, and then rested, and then moved again. Resting meant landing on the ground or a rock, being very still for a few moments. When this happened the cactus wondered with an aching concern if the thing had lost its ability of free willed motion. Of course it hadn't, and it repeated this rest/play dance for the rest of its life.

Only one minute into this dance, the cactus decided this was the most excited it had ever been (or ever would be). The Saguaro invented the first word it knew; a name for the suspended flapping thing, but also the feeling it brought. It was *moth*. Next, the Saguaro came to the conclusion that it wanted to hold this moth. To keep it. In order to do so, the Saguaro cactus, of course, would need to grow an arm. It decided to look away from the moth until it was sure it would be able to hold it. The cactus wouldn't be able to bear watching the moth flap away while it was armless and helpless.

The moth flew away about five minutes later, and thirty years went by. The Saguaro had grown two feet taller and its first arm. It had been, without pause, replaying its one minute with the moth during this entire time. It turned to the place where the moth had last been with an unprecedented excitement, and was met with nothing.

At six feet and 80 years, this was the first time that the Saguaro felt loss. It spent decades mourning the loss of the moth. The cactus spent a lot of time sleeping.

When the Saguaro was roughly a century old, and about ten feet tall, a new moth landed on its arm. The cactus was deeply asleep and unaware. By the time it woke the moth had left. A curious tingle on its arm remained, however. It had never felt this before, and the

more the cactus thought on it, the more the tingle turned into a little annoyance, and then finally an itch. This new itch was a distraction from the moth, and the cactus decided it needed another arm to scratch the itch on the first.

Fortunately, its body was already involuntarily growing one. The itch remained for twenty-five years, until finally, the cactus scratched it with a new arm. It had moved on its own volition. The itch was relieved. The Saguaro cactus lived the next hundred or so years, involuntarily growing taller and gaining more arms, enjoying views and memories, never again needing to act against its stationary nature until it quietly died.