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VIEW OF NOPALES FROM A WHALE BONE

by Lindsey Keller

My grandfather lays these angry adolescents down,
prickly tender pads, not fruit.
The green bitter, not the sweet maroon.

At night, the saguaros bend in the desert,
pat the cacti with spines fine
as a baby's hair.
Ten cuidado, they say.

I watch from the shade of the trailer home.
I, pinned to the side by a rib
bone long as I am tall
taken from a whale carcass in Mexico.
A child pinned by a bleached
beached wishbone.

The paring knife slides over the nopal.
The spines believe they sharpen the knife
until they are the blades to break.

Dead cacti stand mummified
for years. The desert is filled with skeletons
propped up by a hard life.

