

The Cool of the Evening

by Tamara Linse

Imagine a place so dry you can tell where every raindrop falls because that is where a plant struggles to survive. Open sagebrush-, juniper-, and greasewood-dotted plains and hills surrounded by navy- to slate-colored mountains that hulk in the distance. One mountain looks like a dinosaur taking a nap on its belly.

The dirt shades from deep black to gray, from brick red to pale tan, from brown to white. It's as if someone took a paintbrush to the hills and streaked them with color and then dotted them with deep green bushes. Down valleys, irrigated farmlands of electric green skirt the cottonwood-lined creeks.

If you close your eyes, you can smell baking dirt, sagebrush, juniper, willow, and the wet places down by the creek. In the morning, pockets of cool intersperse with pockets of heat, and rocks are chilly to the bare feet but the dirt in the sun warms your bare toes. You can hear the sound of running water, the twee of the birds, and the buzz of insects. Every once in a while, in the evening, you can hear the distinct call of the meadowlark or the bark of a coyote.

There is so little light pollution that, at night, the stars sprinkle across the whole sky and you feel like you could make your way by starlight alone. The Milky Way cuts a wide swath diagonally across the sky. At night, the crickets, one or two or three, sit outside your bedroom window and chirp and chirp, and the creek tinkles in the background. The cool of the evening feels so good after the baking of the day.

Tamara Linse grew up on a ranch in the south Pryor Mountains.

www.tamaralinse.com