

THERE IS A MOUNTAIN range in the city where I was raised. It unfurls on a north-south axis, bisecting the town, with Mexico at its southern tip. When I visit my mother, we often hike a dusty trail that starts near her house on the west side. The path takes us toward an area where tectonic forces have pushed against red sediment to form the shape of a bird with its wings expanded. To the north of the right wing, a road cuts through the mountain, which drastically shortens the distance from one side of town to the other. The drive is beautiful, and as it climbs to a higher elevation, before the descent to the other side, there is a remarkable view of the desert basin.

When I was young my father and I ritually watched the PBS programs *Nature* and *Nova*. And like many Americans, he had a subscription to National Geographic. Recently, I cut out all of the mountains that appeared in every issue of my father's collection, a twenty-

five year span. By turning over the clipping, a random section of the next page is offered. This is in a sense, the other side of the mountain.

The east side of the city lies over the ridge. My father lived there after he and my mother separated. It remains the unknown, less traveled, and darker side of the mountain—literally, because as the sun sets, the west side is bathed in golden light, while the east faces a dark purple silhouette. While in the middle stages of cancer, my mother brought my father back to live at our house on the west side. However, as his condition worsened, it was necessary to relocate him to a care home, which happened to be on the east side. A decade ago, he died there. During my most recent visit to see my mother, I drove on the road that cuts through the mountain, traveling west to east, and then back again. Somewhere in the middle, the ashy remains of my father mingle with the desert terrain. □