

Third World America

The sticker on the cardboard
thin trailer door read bitch.

The door lock
consisted of two bent nails
on the inside door jamb
turned just so.

The floor visibly deteriorating.
No running water,
as evidenced by two gigantic
sixty-gallon water jugs sitting,
poised, ready to collapse the floor.

Two overly-friendly ungroomed curs
worm their ways about the feet
of those maneuvering
the dilapidated hovel.

The five year old girl says,
“Move your fucking ass,”
to her eight year old brother
and no-one bats an eye.

An evangelist preaches on the radio
and the little girl tells me that the two
facedown King James Bibles
splayed open on the dining room table
are Jesus Christ books.

I see a cockroach crawling on one of them.

In Remembrance of Russell Means

The horsemen rode with his ashes
from Five Mile to Taopi Cikala—
Little Wound High School,
where a White Buffalo Star-Quilt hung
at the top of an erected tipi.

The ashes of Russell Means,
carried in a leather satchel
by a Lakota AIM warrior,
were ceremoniously placed inside.

Crow Dog spoke of Wounded Knee
and the American Indian's
Civil Rights Movement.

I smudged with smoking sage
while remembering the White-man's lies
of my childhood,
which demonized men
like Banks and Means
and propitiated Manifest Destiny.

Later, his ashes were scattered
in the sacred Black Hills,
his name uttered in Lakota
by AIM warriors,
softly repeated in English
by the women
as a meteor blazoned across
the dark October sky.

American Avocets

White, cinnamon and ebony
tri-colored birds,
precariously perched
upon circus-stilt legs,
searching for tiny invertebrates,
stir up mudflat mud
with re-curved bills
while coyote eyes watch
from opposite shore.

Please Don't Cut Them Down

Allow them just to hang there.
A reminder of loneliness,
of pain—their pain and ours.

Let them hang there as martyrs
witness to the horror of living.

Strawberry Snow

The golden gibbous moon glowed
coppery red over the crimson snow.
Her red mitten frozen like a puppet
standing on four fingers, thumb raised
accusingly—pointing at the blood red
paint on a snowy wintery palette.

He raped her there. Her hymen broke.
Her virginal blood stained the snow red,
like a daub of paint on a painter's palette.
His awful alcohol breath mingled
with his ugly grunts of gratification.

He named her baby Strawberry Snow.

They never married...only in the Indian way.
She hated him but couldn't leave—
he was her baby's father.
Where would she go? What would she do?
All her friends were raped by their baby's father—
who was she to expect something better?

Ten times in thirteen years she carried his seed.
Her youth destroyed, her body broken.
All of them girls, all of them violently conceived.

The people elected him to the tribal council.
He ran the sacred sweat ceremonies
for his native red brothers. They prayed to
Tunkasila, burned flesh offerings from scarred arms.
Afterwards he'd prey on her flesh, and she'd
lie in his arms, psychologically scarred inside.

Year after year the same violent pictographs
indelible on her symbolic winter count of human hide.

One wintry evening she found Strawberry Snow
bloodied, bruised, confused and crying.
Her shirt was ripped, her pants on backwards.
Her raven hair disheveled and tangled.

(stanza break)

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And like a mirror-image, the forlorn look in her eyes.

She found him beside the dwindling wood pile
trousers down, passed out in the bloody snow.
The acrid smell of his beer bated breath
mingled with the sickening odor of strawberry
blood and incestuous cloying lust
permeating the December St. Crispen's Eve air.

Not so much for Strawberry Snow or herself
but for her other nine daughters,
she stumbled into the tar-paper shack,
frantically retrieved his deer rifle—
the one he, laughing, used to point between her legs—
and leveled the muzzle at his head.
Swearing at the golden gibbous moon, her face glowing,
she screamed, "I'll show him strawberry snow!"
and blew his drunken Indian head off.