



Spring 2005

The Forum: Spring 2005

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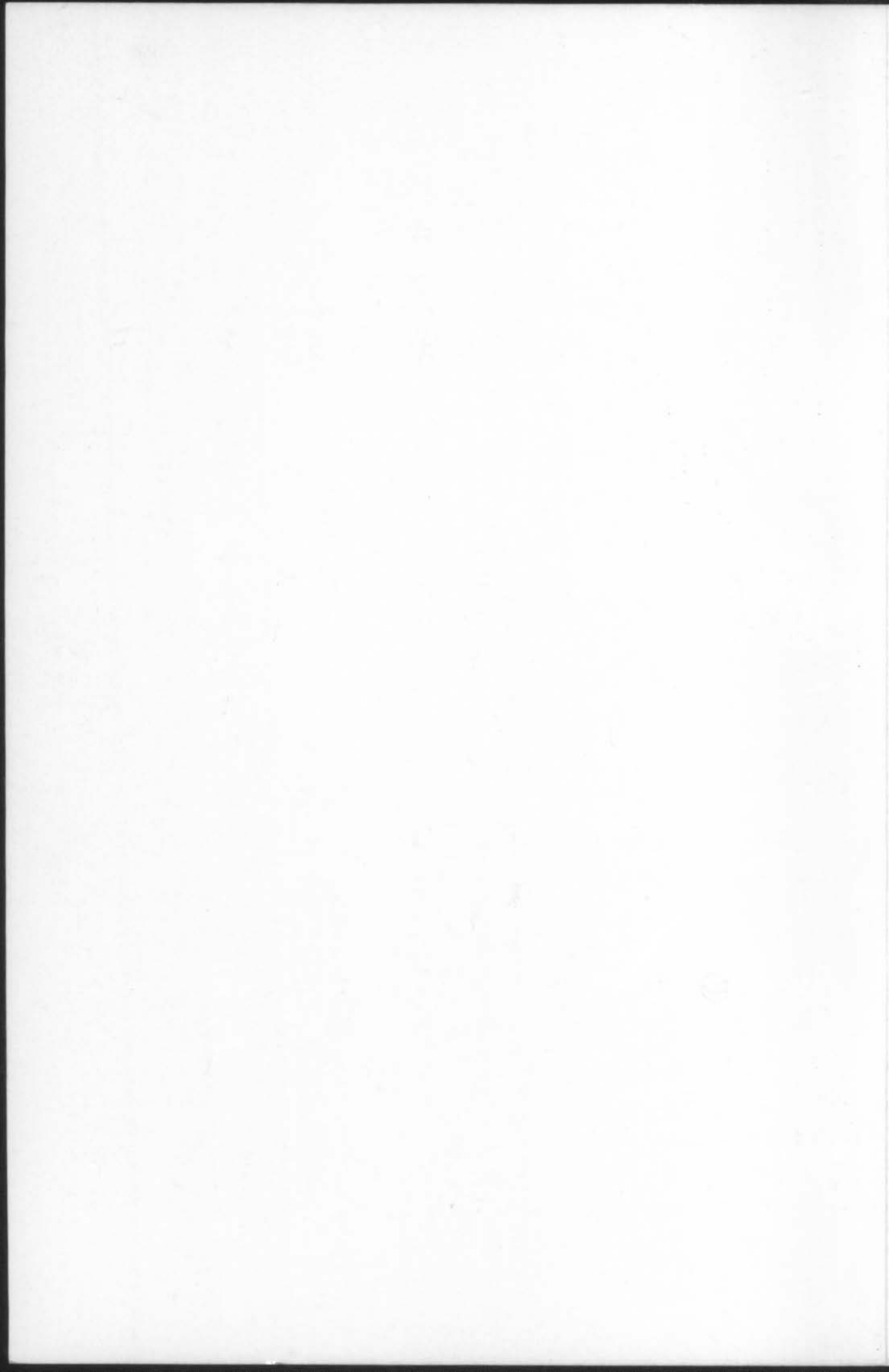
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Sara Walker

Gray Morning

I love those gray mornings
Where the sky seems to have fallen so low
That mist must push it back up.
I love those mornings where
You can hear someone coming before you can see them,
But you don't see them or hear them because no one is out
In this sort of weather
On this sort of morning
But you.
It's solemn,
Sacred,
And the world seems to bless you
By its loud silence,
By its cleanliness,
By its existence.
And it remains silent as you walk along the way,
Sometimes feeling a glancing spray upon your brow
knowing that in your solitude,
You are not alone.



Laura Rabenberg

Tessa Sandstrom

Half-smoked Cigarettes and an Empty Glass

It was 12:30 when I looked at the clock and began putting a few things away and cleaning up. The bar was filled with regulars and I gave South and his friends a little more freedom to goof around than I usually did.

"Give you a dollar if you can jump over that table and chairs," South said, egging Petey on, who was willing to do anything for a dollar. I laughed as Petey took off at a dead sprint across the bar and jumped, catching his foot on the chair. He belly flopped on the table and rolled off, sending chairs scattering across the floor. Another stepped up, betting he could do it, and everyone watched as he tightened his bootlaces. We were all watching as the second guy nearly cleared the table, catching his foot on the chair on the other side of the table and tumbling into the jukebox. I was laughing and didn't notice the back door open until South straightened up and stared toward the door. Trev, an Indian from the nearby reservation stood in the doorway glaring at South.

"Fuck!" I muttered, my smile fading quickly and Jules looked back. "Oh boy," she said. "Isn't that the ol' boy South got in a fight with the last time he was in town?" I remained quiet and watched Trev as he walked up to South, extending his hand. South accepted, though he only glared at Trev, cocking his head back and forth slightly and, even from where I stood I could see the gleam had returned to his eyes. They talked quietly, still shaking hands, and I walked back wiping off already clean tables just so I could hear them better. Though they spoke quietly there was an edge to both their voices. I jumped when South growled loudly, "What's your problem, Boy?!" I walked up to them, my heart beating and just stood watching. They paid no attention to me, neither one daring to take their eyes off the other.

"You owe me money from that fucking arm wrestling match!" said Trev.

"You know as well as I do that I won that fair and square," said South a little calmer now, but there was still that edge in his voice. They began to argue as Trev pushed South.

"Hey!" I said, stepping between the two. "Knock it off alright!" I

turned to Trev, pointing at him. "It was a long time ago and it wasn't in my bar, so keep it the hell out of my bar!" I turned to South who was flexing his fists, "And there's no goddamn fighting here!" I said.

I looked between the two and Trev glanced at me, although he didn't seem to really see me. "I'm sorry Matti," he said softly. He looked back at South, but I stepped so Trev had to look at me again and I glared. He nodded, then went to the bar and sat next to his boss from another construction company he was working with in town. South stared after Trev and I grabbed South's arm jerking his around so he faced me. He looked at me seriously, his eyes hard.

"I'm not gonna start anything Miss Matti, but if he does something first, I'm not gonna back down." I only looked at him with serious and pleading eyes. He returned my stare, a stubborn look on his face. "I'm not Matti," he said, but his voice wasn't reassuring as he looked toward the front of the bar at Trev, his jaw twitching. He looked at me again and I only stared at him a moment before saying in a quiet, yet harsh tone, "Just stay the fuck back here, okay South. I don't want you to even *look* to the front!" I walked back behind the bar, glaring at both, warning them to stay in their places.

The next fifteen minutes crept by and though I wanted to begin closing, I stayed behind the bar in front of Trev and his boss Barney so Trev couldn't leave or say anything. I heard South once talking about fighting him and I just turned on him angrily. "Don't even think about it!" He kept quiet every time I came around and I watched as South went to the bathroom, eyeing Trev. I glared, but South only looked at me stubbornly. I shook my head as he disappeared in the bathroom. It was the one thing I hated about South. He was too proud to be told what to do, and even if I begged, pleaded, or yelled, he would push me to my limit before backing down.

Someone from the floor yelled for one last beer before closing and I hesitated, glancing at the bathroom door before hurrying to give them their drinks. I was reluctant to leave Trev and my reasons were justified as Trev got up to go to the bathroom. The next few minutes were in slow-motion. South was now sitting at the end of the bar near the bathroom and I heard the two exchange words as I collected for the round at the table. I looked up when I heard a loud clatter.

South's chair was tilted and I waited for it to fall, but somehow he managed to tip it back upright even as Trev clobbered at South's face and chest. "Fuck!" I yelled, but stayed in place, only watching. South tried to get off the stool and face Trev, but he caught his work boot on the rung and fell, Trev falling on top of him. Trev now had a chokehold on South and they stayed in that position for a few moments, South unable to move. Trev had at least a hundred pounds on South and South sud-

denly looked small in his vulnerable position.

I just watched, beginning to think that that was it, perhaps they'd quit now because it looked as though Trev wanted to let South up, but was unsure if he should. South's face had turned red from the chokehold and since the two hadn't moved for what seemed like hours, I began to move towards them to try and break it up, but jumped back as South suddenly broke free and the two came barrelling behind the bar, South stumbling backwards as he struggled to regain his balance and face Trev. Trev clawed at him, but only got a hold of his shirt, ripping it off. I jumped over the counter to avoid being trampled on and looked angrily at Barney, Petey, and the rest of the workers, wondering why they hadn't stepped up to help yet. I looked slowly back at the fight as South finally fell backward, Trev again jumping on top of South and choking him. They remained there again and I could see a look of desperation on Trev's face. I finally realized why Trev held him there; it was not because he was trying to get him under control, but because he knew the only advantage he had over South was his weight. Trev struggled to hold South as he squirmed, his temper rising even more. Slowly I started to come out of the daze I was in and anger washed over me. I saw Jules holding the phone in her hand and she looked at it uncertainly, her thumb hovering over the keypad. I rushed over to her and knocked the phone from her hand and she looked at me thankfully.

One by one, everyone in the bar seemed to break out of the disbelief that had taken hold of us and kept us motionless. They approached the two hesitantly as South finally wriggled free again and turned to face Trev. The two looked at each other, waiting for the other to make a move and I stepped between them, yelling. "Knock it off now and get out while you can. The cops are coming!" Both of the men hesitated for a brief moment at my threat, looking at me, then out the window for flashing lights. Their hesitation gave Petey and Barney time to grab each one of the men and back them further away from one another. They struggled free though and again I yelled as I held a hand to Trev and pointed at South to stay put. "Knock it off!" I pushed as hard as I could at Trev's huge body, but barely moved him as he continued to stare at South. My anger rose more because no one was listening to me and I turned entirely to Trev and pushed again and again, yelling for him to leave. I looked back at South once as he hesitated. I wondered if it would be easier to get South out of the bar, but I didn't dare leave Trev and give him the opportunity to charge again, so I turned back towards him.

"Get going now!" I said, pushing again. I felt someone grab my shoulders and pull me back and I struggled against the firm grip as I stared at the two. I was shaking with rage by now and spitting threats at both the men until finally, I saw Barney grab Trev's shoulder and hurry him out the door.

I felt my shoulders being released, but I just stood there shaking, staring at the door. People were talking loudly now, though I could barely hear them over the thudding of my own heart in my ears. "Are the cops coming?" "Did you call the cops?"

"Hey, who called the cops?" I felt someone grab my shoulder and I turned around angrily, throwing the arm from me. It was Petey and he squeezed my shoulder again. "Matti," he said seriously. "Did you call the cops?" I only stared at him, still in an angry daze until he shook me.

I looked at South, his eyes were bloodshot and blood dripped from his left ear. His chest was heaving and my eyes wandered down to a tattoo of a heart on his chest. A ribbon with the names of his daughters encircled the heart. I looked at him again dazedly. "Matti? Did you really call the cops?" he asked, shifting his weight nervously. My eyes wandered to everyone else in the bar and they stared, waiting for my answer. I only turned numbly and went behind the bar, running a rag under cold water. "Matti?"

"No! I didn't!" I snapped, looking up angrily. "Did anyone else?!" Everyone only shook their heads slowly.

"Matti?"

"Shut up, Samuel Fawkes," I said calling South by his real name. I took a deep breath to get a hold of myself and held the rag up. "Can I clean you up?" He nodded and I began scolding him as I gently wiped the blood from his ear and neck. "Goddamnit South. You know I hate fights. I ask one thing of you, and that's not to fight when I'm working."

"I know, Matti. I'm really sorry. You know that, Matti."

"Do I?!" I snapped again. He looked at me a little hurt. He was quiet as I wiped blood from the confederate flag on his arm.

"Honestly, Matti. I'm sorry." He hesitated, watching me, then continued. "Really. And thank you for not calling the cops." My eyes flicked back to the tattoo on his chest and I looked at him again, my face softening. "Yes, baby. You know I'd never call the cops on you."

"Cuz you know, right Matti?"

"Yeah sweetie, I know."

"Thank you Matti. Thank you. I'm sorry, Matti. Thank you." He was quiet for a few moments. Almost everyone had left the bar by now and the only sound was the humming of neon lights. He rubbed my back and nodded. "You know."

"Shush Sam," I said quietly and he flinched a little as I rubbed a little harder at the blood matted in his thick whiskers. "Sorry baby." I muttered. My hands were still shaking. He was quiet as I finished cleaning him up, then looked at me hesitantly.

"Matti?"

"Yeah babe?"

"Can I please have another beer. I spilled mine." I looked at Jules and nodded and she grabbed another beer from the cooler and slid it down the bar towards South. He took a long drink, then squeezed my hand. "I'm really sorry Matti. You know I didn't want to cause no trouble for you." He paused a moment, searching for something to say. "And I really did try to dodge all those glasses and bottles back there. I tried not to break anything. Really, Matti. I'm really sorry." He looked at me with his big brown eyes, cocking his head slowly back and forth like he always did when he was trying to make you understand. I looked numbly at the bottles. They all still stood in their neat rows except for one that hovered half-way off the counter. Jules straightened it and I looked back at South and nodded.

"Yeah, you did!" I said. I was amused that he had worried about the bottles as a man much larger than him was charging after him. I stood back and looked for any blood I hadn't cleaned off his face and South began joking with his friends about the fight.

"Yeah, I mighta got my ass kicked, but who's still in the bar, drinkin' a beer, and gettin' cleaned up by the barmaid!" he said cockily when Pete imitated South's expression when he was in the chokehold.

"Hey!" I said, my authority feeling threatened. "You're just lucky I like you South or you'd be sitting in a cell by now!" I said. "I did think about calling the cops, you know." He looked at me shocked.

"Miss Matti! I can't believe you would have called the cops!"

"Well, I warned you. Don't fight in my bar!" I said, my voice rising again. South looked at me with disbelief. I just patted him on the cheek and said softly. "You're just lucky I like you so much. Consider this your last warning. Go home now baby. You're gonna be hurtin' tomorrow." He wrapped his giant arm around my shoulders and drew me in, kissing me on the cheek.

"Oh it's them words that hurts most Matti." He looked at me again with his soft, gleaming eyes. I smiled and shook my head.

"Quit lookin' at me like that South." He smiled now, knowing I had forgiven him.

"Thank you Matti. You know."

"Yes, I know Sammy."

South turned and left with his friends and I turned to look at the bar. Chairs still lay on the floor and tables were in disarray. I began to straighten bar mirrors and signs as Jules picked chairs up.

"Y'alright?" asked Jules.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Go on home, I'm just gonna leave everything for Monday I think."

"A'ight," she said grabbing her purse. She looked as tired and shaken as me. "See you tomorrow at the dock?"

"Yeah," I said, grabbing the glass of Crown from the bar.

"Relax a bit now babe, a'ight?"

"Yeah."

She flicked the bar lights off as she left and I lay my head in my arms, leaning on the counter. I allowed exhaustion to wash over me now that I was alone and I felt about ready to cry. I heard the bathroom door creak and I stood up quickly as the stranger came walking in.

"Didn't know you were still here!" I said, trying to sound indifferent. He only sat down and lit a cigarette, glancing at the glass in my hand. "Sorry," I said, quickly giving him his glass back. "I figured you were gone." He took a sip and I was watching my hands shake, trying to steady them when I noticed him watching me. I clasped my hands together, a little embarrassed. I didn't like people seeing me so shook up and vulnerable in the bar. He cleared his throat and I jumped, looking at him as though he'd fired a gunshot. He only looked at me though, and I went back to cleaning until he said quietly, "You shouldn't try to get in between two big guys like that."

"Huh?" I said, looking back up at him, still shook up and in a dream-like state.

"Coulda got hurt," he said quietly staring out the window.

I only looked at him, confused, then muttered "Oh!" as his words sunk in. "That was you?" He nodded, taking a drag from his cigarette. The red and blue neon bar light flickered off his face and dark eyes. "Well," I said straightening my back. "No one else was going to do anything, and I wanted it to end before anything got wrecked in my bar." He looked at me, an amused glint in his eye as he stamped his cigarette out.

"Relax a bit. You put on a good show, but you're not that tough." I became embarrassed and angry that he doubted my strength, but he kept looking at me, amused. "You don't gotta act tough anymore. There's no one else in here now." I looked around the bar as though his news was a surprise. I let my composure go and sighed. "Five years," I said. "Five years today I've been here, and that was my first fight."

"You don't like not having everything under your control do you?" he asked.

"No. No, I don't. If you let one thing out of your control, you appear weak and people will push you to see what they can get away with. So you just don't let them get away with anything," I said matter-of-factly. It started to rain gently and he stared out the window, watching as one by one the fires went out along the shoreline and a parade of headlights moved towards town. I watched too, numb and jaded.

"You let that ol' boy push you," he said suddenly, looking at me defiantly. He lit a cigarette and seemed to search my face. "Why 'nt you let that girl call the cops?"

I returned his stare, but I felt a flicker of doubt move across my

face at my trust in South. I did let him push me. I always did. I looked down quickly and began kicking at a quarter stuck to the floor with stale coke and booze. "I could never call the cops on Sam," I muttered sadly. "He's gotten into too much trouble." I looked up, smiling uneasily. "I think he has a warrant out for his arrest back home." I hesitated. "Don't know what for though." I looked back down at the quarter, knowing how bad that sounded. "But he's a real nice guy, South. Really."

I kicked again, the quarter finally coming loose, and kept talking, though more to myself. "He's always been good to me 'n Jules. Helped us out a lot. One time one of Jules' ex-boyfriends actually pulled a knife on her when she left here after dealing blackjack. She'd had problems with him for a long time. He was a jealous bastard and used to beat her, but South ended it all. We don't know how. Don't want to. All we know is Johnny isn't bothering Jules no more." I shook my head and was quiet for awhile. The stranger only smoked and stared out the window. I took a deep breath and began to gather up my tips. "No, no. I won't be responsible for getting him in trouble again. He'd be in jail for a long time and I really don't think he deserves it." I furrowed my brow a little worriedly. "I won't be the one to send 'im to jail."

I became quiet as I shoved my tips into a brown bag, but he looked at me, and I took it as an invitation to keep on. "One time," I began fondly, "one of his little girls got sick. He drove for 40 hours straight home to see his girl. I don't think he's had a license for 10 years, but he sped through five states anyway, risking being picked up to see his little girl. Even a little speeding ticket would get him in jail, but he risked it anyway for his little girl." I looked out the window, nodding my head decidedly. "No. Sammy's a real nice guy. He's got a lot on his mind with his family, 'specially his little girls. But he won't talk about it. Something musta happened today. That's why he was looking to fight. That's the only time he goes looking for a fight. I have figured that much out." I became quiet as I recalled South's sadness and concern as Jules asked about his daughters.

"He got his ass kicked," said the stranger after a few minutes of silence. I looked at him, then nodded.

"Yeah. Yeah he did." I was quiet again, searching the darkness outside the window and murmured to myself, "He's a nice guy though. Doesn't deserve to go to jail."

"What was that?" he asked as he got up from his chair.

"Huh? Oh, nothing." I laughed nervously. "Just talking to myself, a bad habit after five years in this place! No one sane to talk to but myself, and most of the time I really doubt I qualify as sane!" He searched my face with a slight smile on his face, the sad, lonely look leaving his eyes for a moment. I smiled at him—a real, honest smile—something I usually did-

n't do, especially in the bar. I began to clean away the bar and picked up his ashtray to empty it as he put on his jacket.

"Can I ask you something?" I asked looking at the dozens of half-smoked cigarettes that filled the tray. "Why do you only smoke half the cigarette? I mean, you chain smoke them anyway, so why not finish—" I stopped short when I looked up at him and his face had hardened. He looked out the window a few moments then looked back at me. He was quiet and I felt as though I'd crossed some line, though I wasn't sure how. He looked back at me, a serious look on his face and placed his hand lightly on my shoulder.

"It's a good thing you did for that southern boy, I think," he said squeezing my shoulder gently, then dropping his hand into his pocket. He looked at me a moment and nodded. "You're a good girl." He turned and left, and I watched his headlights sweep across the empty lot. I stood there for a moment looking over the empty bar and everything looked new and foreign. It was quiet except for the buzz from the neon lights and I couldn't believe that just an hour ago the bar was full and a fight was about to break out. I felt a desperate need to get out come over me, but I only sat down on the stool and closed my eyes, exhausted. A random song clicked on the jukebox, an echo from the long, hot week. I stared at the half-smoked cigarettes and empty glass on the bar. I sighed again, closed my eyes and rested my head in my hands, suddenly feeling like I was more a part of this bar now than I ever had before.

(Part I of "Half-Smoked Cigarettes and an Empty Glass" appeared in the Fall 2004 issue of the Forum)

Derek Swenson

Affectionate Arson

When it's cold outside, there is nothing
Like a nice warm fire

As today
My newest fire is warming my face—

Gently crackling, as intensity building
Punctuated by little explosions of sparks—
They ripple through the night
Each is a love song to be cherished
A song that sends splinters dancing out from the blaze
Splinters that leave delicate wisps of fragrant smoke
Drifting like tentacles in their wake
Splinters that crinkle sweetly under my boots
When afterwards I walk away

And just think! Just look!
How the flame writhes – twisting
As ecstasy unleashed, or perhaps pain
While yet transforming all our perceived decay
With wildly chaotic virtuosity
To leave a fertile field of cool ashes
We see this every day

So join me by this fire, while yet it still lasts!
We can share it, you and I, as friends
And let its heat seep into our bones
And let its chromatic performance dazzle our eyes
So enamored that even us ourselves be led to succumb
That we might for a second whirl with the splinters
As we are willingly overcome

Kari Ann Johnson

Casey

Eric Michael was born in June 1982, the first-born child to two loving parents. Eric wasn't supposed to be born in June, however. His expected arrival date was September 10th, making him three months premature. But Eric's problems didn't begin with his premature birth and they certainly didn't end there either.

A baby's sex can usually be readily determined at around eight weeks into the pregnancy. In Eric's case, this standard eight weeks came and went with no clear indication of gender. This puzzled Eric's young doctor, who had never experienced such a case. In fact, upon delivery, Eric's sex was still not clear, and in the hospital records his sex was classified as "ambiguous." Eric spent several months off and on in an incubator, but pulled through despite his very early arrival. When Eric had finally caught up on development to the point at which he should've been upon birth, his sex was still unclear. A parent's worst nightmare had come true. Imagine expecting a child and upon delivery the doctor says, "Congratulations! It's a ... well, I'm not sure."

Eric was born with a condition that affects approximately one in every 100 births and his specific condition estimates closer to 1 out of every 1,000. Eric was an intersex baby. According to The Intersex Society of North America, "A person with an intersex condition is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that is not considered 'standard' for either male or female." Eric's sex chromosomes have the combination XXY. This combination resulted in the internal reproductive system of a female, and the exterior reproductive organs of a male, excluding testes. His doctor described him as 20% male and 80% female.

Eric's parents faced a dilemma. How do they raise a child that is 20% male and 80% female? Do you raise the child as a boy, or as a girl? Do you have to choose one or the other? What do you name an "ambiguous" gender child? If you don't raise the child specifically as male or female, what pronoun do you use to describe such a child? And the scariest question of all, do you perform surgery to "correct" this "problem?"

Eric's parents decided against surgery because it would've only further complicated his already fragile premature state. They decided to raise

their child as a boy, which according to the Intersex Society of North America, goes against the norm, since nine out of ten parents of intersex babies decide to raise them as females. Eric's doctor also advised that his parents raise him as a female. Eric's parents went against this advice, however, which proved to be a serious gamble.

Eric had what most would consider a fairly normal childhood, despite his intersex condition. Eric's parents raised him as a boy, without explaining to him at all his condition. He was raised to believe he was a normal boy. Something that struck a chord with Eric, however, was his parents' constant nudging him to be masculine. They discouraged feminine behavior and toys that could be considered feminine.

Another red flag for Eric indicating something wasn't normal was the progression of his physical development compared to his peers. Around thirteen years-old, boys his age were starting puberty. They were beginning to develop facial hair and starting to shave. Eric, however, reached age seventeen without hitting puberty. He noticed his body was more like a young boy than a teenager. What Eric didn't realize was that his body wasn't so much boy-like as it was feminine.

Eric's parents took him to a doctor (not the same doctor who delivered him because they had moved since Eric's birth). The doctor started Eric on a hormone treatment consisting of testosterone pills taken daily, and testosterone shots administered monthly. Eric followed this regiment for about six months before he realized something was terribly wrong. His body was reacting to the testosterone and making him very sick. Eric didn't understand that the testosterone was in the process of killing his ovaries, which was what was causing his sickness. But Eric didn't know that he had ovaries.

Eric went against his parents' wishes and stopped taking the testosterone pills. He would simply pretend to swallow them and then later throw them away. He couldn't get away from the monthly shots, however, and said that he "had to put up with them." After about a year and a half, the testosterone had boosted him into male puberty so the regiment was discontinued. The testosterone had given Eric a slightly more male body and had allowed him to develop facial hair.

Eric continued developing "normally" and finished high school and began college. Eric left for college in the fall still believing that he was a male and that his medical complications were due to his premature birth. His parents' lie began to fall apart shortly after Eric began his freshman year at college. Eric's dad had expensive medical bills that resulted in the family's health insurance to be unreasonably high. Although Eric was still covered by his family's health insurance as long as he was in school, his parents advised him to get his own health insurance to help the family out.

During Eric's health insurance application process, the company for his

driver's license number and his birth certificate. When Eric asked his mother for his birth certificate, she sent him a photocopy that was filled out by hand. The date on the certificate read June, the name read Eric Michael and the sex indicated male. The problem was that aside from the birth date, everything else was written in by hand. This was not something one would expect to see on a standard birth certificate. This struck Eric as odd, but he continued on and sent the birth certificate to the insurance company. The birth certificate was returned to him, saying that a photocopy was not sufficient and that he would need to send an original birth certificate and that it would be returned to him upon verification. Eric passed this information onto his mother who told him that their original copy had been lost in their move to North Dakota and the photocopy was the best she could do.

Eric knew something was wrong here also, because he knew his mother was careful to keep important documents. She had told him once that his birth certificate was kept in the safe. With his mother proving to be of no help, Eric contacted the hospital where he was born. He left his name, Eric Michael, and his birth date and they told him they would look up his records and send a certificate. Since Eric was expecting to receive his certificate in the mail, he was surprised to receive a phone call from the hospital. He was informed that they had no child born in June by the name of Eric Michael. They did, however, have a child born on the same date by the name of "Erica Michelle" with Eric's social security number.

Eric was told that the doctor that delivered him still worked at the hospital and that he would explain further. Eric's doctor was put on the phone and he explained to Eric that he was born as an intersex baby and that his mother had named him Erica Michelle because his doctor had advised his mother that most intersex babies are raised as females. Eric's father was out of town and unaware of any of this. His Mother's sister was at her side instead and both thought it would be best to raise Erica as female, but the doctors intervened saying that the presence of what they called an "enlarged clitoris" could very likely develop into a more "penile-looking member" as Erica grew older. Thus, based on physical appearance alone the doctors convinced Erica's mother that life as Eric (a boy) would be easier and make more sense as s/he got older.

By the time of Eric's father arrived, his birth certificate had already been printed with the name Erica Michelle, and this copy was filed with the hospital. The hospital also had a policy of printing two birth certificates for premature babies. One is printed with the child's name as a certificate of live birth, and the other is left blank, intended to be a death certificate, due to the high death rate of premature births. Eric was told by one of his aunts that she remembers his mother photocopying something at the hospital. Eric's aunt was a secretary and was familiar with photo-

copy machines. She offered to help, but Eric's mother quickly said she needed no help, which Eric's aunt found odd. This is where Eric believes his mother got a copy of his birth certificate reading Eric Michael. He believes she photocopied the blank birth certificate, filled in the information herself, and it was this birth certificate that she sent to Eric for the health insurance company.

This is how Eric discovered he was an intersex baby. He didn't confront his parents with the information he received from the hospital. He was waiting for his parents to come clean themselves, and confront him. Years later, Eric is still waiting. His parents have never confessed to him that he was an intersex baby and that they chose to raise him as a male, despite their better judgment.

Upon discovering this life-changing information, that is exactly what Eric did, changed his life. Eric had known his whole life that something was missing, something was wrong. He wasn't like other boys and didn't want to be. He felt he had emotional qualities similar to that of a female and often found himself identifying more with females. So Eric changed his life. He decided first to change his name to something more appropriate. He hated the name Eric, given to him by his parents, which defined him as a male, so he legally changed his name to "Casey," a more non-gender specific name. For a while he was satisfied with this change, but eventually it was not enough. Since Casey felt he identified more with females, and that his doctor had determined at birth he was 80% female and only 20% male, Casey decided to switch from his assigned gender as male and live the rest of his life as a female.

Casey broke this news to her parents who didn't take it very well. They took her name change hard enough, but this decision to live as female was especially hard for them. Casey's parents to this day refuse to refer to her as Casey or use feminine pronouns, like "her" and "she," to describe her. Casey has let this slide because they are her parents, although she finds it irritating. She has however, lost friends over the matter. Some people that knew her in high school as "Eric" refuse to recognize her as Casey and as a female. She finds it hurtful to be referred to as a male and to have male pronouns used to describe her. She finds it is a direct insult to be referred to as "he" or "him."

Today Casey is taking further steps to become more female. She doesn't believe in sexual reassignment surgery. She says, why "fix" something that doesn't need to be "fixed?" She does, however, want to reverse some of the damage done by the testosterone treatment her parents put her on as a teenager. She is saving money and looking into processes to remove the facial hair she developed from the testosterone through a series of laser treatments. She is also on an estrogen regiment. She takes Progesterone, which works with her genetics to develop female

characteristics, and Premarin, which works the current makeup of her body. Together these two work to soften her overall appearance in every aspect from bone structure to skin texture. In addition she is also working on voice lessons to soften her voice to make it more feminine.

Casey is working on her physical appearance to make it more feminine and make it more closely match her feminine feelings inside. Casey has always had an underlying sense that she connected more with females, although she did not correspondingly feel attraction to males. Casey is sexually attracted to females, although she doesn't consider herself to be a lesbian, because being a lesbian constitutes being a female attracted to other females, and Casey isn't technically a female. So Casey informed me that she considers herself a "metasexual," which she described as "out-of-the-ordinary sexuality," since there is no clear correct terminology to describe her sexuality. Casey tells me that she often gets asked the question, "Are you a guy or a girl?" And she responds, "I'm an intersexed-transgender metasexual female." Transgender meaning she has switched from her assigned birth gender, intersex meaning she has male and female reproductive organs, and metasexual to describe her sexuality. She jokingly told me, the usual response to this is, "Oh."

Casey's sexuality isn't her only unusual feature. She says she likes to dress the way she feels: a combination of genders. She usually wears men's shirts, women's pants, shoes, and accessories. This confusing appearance is disturbing for the more conservative person. Casey has experienced physical and verbal harassment on more than one occasion, and she attributes this to her appearance. She says some people just aren't comfortable with what's different from what they know. Casey says that males are usually more aggressive and confronting with their harassment, while females are more avoiding. She says they just give you "that look that girls have."

Casey's mixed choice of clothing also creates a problem when it comes to using bathrooms. She says she doesn't know which bathroom she is "supposed" to use since she is technically neither male nor female. When unisex bathrooms are available, she uses them, but they are uncommon. Casey says she usually uses whatever restroom she feels like using that particular day, although she feels uncomfortable in both men's and women's restrooms. She says she is working with facilities on her campus to develop more unisex bathrooms for individuals like her. Otherwise she will sometimes use handicapped restrooms, as many of them are not gender specific.

Affiliation with a particular church has also always been a confusing subject for Casey. Her parents raised her Lutheran, but it was clear to Casey at a young age that the Lutheran religion was not for her. She could never understand why one had to go to church to communicate

with God. She wondered, "why can't I communicate with God myself?" She also had a problem with the Lutheran idea of God as a male. She wondered, "why can't God be more like me?" Casey is a religion major and explored several different religions before she settled on practicing a denomination of Wicca that believes in one non-gender specific Goddess/God (depending on who you ask).

Casey's parents have had trouble accepting her changing religion, gender, and lifestyle. Casey feels much resentment toward her parents for raising her as a boy her whole life. She explained that she understands that when she was very young she wouldn't have understood, but she is now 22 years old and her parents have yet to confront her with a discussion about her intersex condition. Casey places most of the blame on her father.

Casey's father is Dutch and was born in Rotterdam. He was an exchange student in a North Dakota high school where he met Casey's Mother and decided to stay in America. His Dutch background was the source of much of the blatant denial of Casey's condition. Casey believes that the way her father was raised discouraged the idea of intersex; babies were either male or female. Casey thinks that her father chose to push her more into male roles because she would be "tougher and stronger" and would be able to deal with teasing and criticism.

While Casey places a large portion of blame on her father, she also feels her mother has wronged her. Casey believes that since she gave birth to Casey, her mother should've made the decision on how to raise her child. Casey's mother did initially choose to raise Casey as a girl, hence the female name on the birth certificate, but she apparently did not fight for Casey when the doctors decided she should be raised as a male.

Although Casey feels resentment towards her parents for making her life more difficult than necessary, she is not bitter about her life now. In fact, she is a very positive and optimistic person. Casey is very open and honest about her life and doesn't want to hide anything. She described her condition as a gift, because she can sympathize with both males and females and she wants to help other people like her be comfortable with themselves. Casey should be an inspiration to others like her.

Jeremy Bold

The Sign Says One-Eleven

The interstate is sleepy
A feeling of space dwells before my eyes
The humming wind caressing and enclosing my car
In a cradle. This bluish gray road curves ahead,
Carefully offering an immense length. She expands Beyond me
And I am carried away. Careless. Carefree.
Even the slight choppiness beneath me succumbs,
replaced by a calm swaying as the wheels of the car rise and
fall upon waves in the road.
Feeling some force upon my lower lip,
Pulling me by an invisible twine,
As though lugged by some large clever fisherman drawing me through fluid
Along pausing yellow lines,
Straining and heaving to haul in his weary prize winner.



Jeremy Bold

Charlotte Skar

Red Cloud or George Washington

I hate filling forms out. It isn't because they are long, repetitive, sometimes seemingly pointless. It's because of the section usually entitled "Race/Ethnicity." Whenever I come to this inevitable section I have to make some kind of decision and I feel like I am choosing sides in a battle. The line in the dirt is drawn and I'm standing on it, debating which side I will tentatively go towards, when all I really want to do is run away.

I am 15/32 Lakota Sioux and am enrolled in the Sicangu tribe on the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota, where my birth mother was born and raised. It's fairly obvious: I have black hair, espresso eyes, and I sport a perma-tan that makes every girl in a prom dress envious. The other 17/32 of me is white Caucasian. My birth father was of European descent. Although this isn't as physically obvious, I was adopted into an all-white family and raised in an all-white community. I grew up in Berthold, North Dakota, which is filled with Norwegians and Germans. My adoptive family includes parents and a brother with blond hair and blue eyes. My adoptive sister does actually have black hair and dark eyes, but her skin can't hold a tan for anything. It's very unusual for someone who is enrolled in a tribe to be adopted into a family and community like this, but of course, it came about because of unusual circumstances.

I was put into a foster family when I was an infant and was later adopted by that same family. I was forty-three days old when I was placed with them, and my parents were unable to get me back due to various personal problems. By the time the decision was made that their rights would be terminated I was almost three years old. As far as everyone was concerned, the adoption process was just procedure. I was already with my adoptive family and very much considered a member of that family. The Rosebud tribe saw this and listened to my birth mother's family who wanted me to stay where I was, and was far too poor to pursue the matter anyway. To take me away from the Skars at that point would have been traumatic and expensive. However, to make sure I didn't "lose my culture," the tribe set up guidelines for my adoption. These guidelines are actually written into the Indian Child Welfare Act, regarding children raised away from their tribal culture. A few times a year, I attend events that will help educate me and remind me of my mother's culture and an-

cestors. Usually, it's a powwow.

A powwow is a very important event for Indian people. Not only does it bring them together, but it is also a celebration of their culture. It reminds everyone of common Indian values: generosity, community, honor, family, wisdom, and respect. The most prominent values are honor, generosity, and community, which is probably the strongest value expressed at a powwow. Powwows preserve the traditional cultures and get people together with food, music, and dancing. A powwow is put on by a certain tribe, but other tribes participate and are very welcome. During a powwow the military and community leaders are honored in an honor dance. Powwows are also famous for their giveaways, where blankets and money are given to everybody and anybody for any reason that can be found. Indians are not the only ones invited to a powwow, however. Another important function of the powwow is introducing people from outside the tribe to the culture. This is where my family fits in.

Although white people are welcome at many powwows, there aren't usually many that attend. It couldn't have been the most comfortable place for my family to be. It's not that they were uncomfortable around Indians, it's more that they knew how many Indians felt about their children being raised in white families. When I was really young, my parents would dress me up in a jingle dress and moccasins. This usually agitated me. Jingle dresses are worn by women who perform the jingle dance, and the jingles are made of Copenhagen lids. The origin of the dress and the dance are from the fur-trade days. The jingles made cool sounds, but it was impossible to sit in one of those dresses. By watching other girls, however, I learned you needed to lift the outer jingle portion when sitting. It almost seems that my family put the dress on me because they wanted to reassure everyone, including themselves, that there was a purpose for them being there. My blond mother usually got evil stares when she held me, so my sister would instead. There was a good reason for the evil stares.

When the U.S. was trying to assimilate the Indians into American culture, one of their main strategies was to prevent Indian children from learning their own culture. They took most Indian children away from their parents and placed them in boarding schools far away. That way the children would learn English and "white" values, instead of the "backward and primitive" Indian ways. Most Indians feel that this policy created more problems because parents and children had nothing in common and spoke different languages. That is, when the parents would get their children back. Too many children were simply taken away from their Indian parents who were considered unfit, and were adopted into white families. However, those children grew up and knew that something was missing. There was a huge disparity between who they were and who they felt they were supposed to be. It was a dark and tragic time for most Indian cultures. Their children were everything and they were ripped away. My

situation is a little different in that my birth parents were given numerous chances to get me back, but it is understandable that some will remain bitter.

What I know of Indian traditions and cultures comes from textbooks or novels that are left over from when my sister took some Indian Studies classes in college. I read them because I was interested in that part of myself. No matter how much I read or learned, I knew there was something missing. There is a big difference between learning traditions and culture and actually knowing. I remember sitting on my jingles and thinking how uncomfortable it was. When I saw the girl next to me lift hers, I learned something more important: the value of belonging through participation. We had a connection and a similar experience. That is how a culture should be learned. This is how Indians are meant to learn their culture: lessons from family and community members. They are taught values through stories. It is through sharing the culture that Indians know who they are. It is how they are to live. I told my sister this, and she knew exactly what I meant. She said that she would never understand her father for the same reasons. It's the difference between studying about the Vietnam War and actually going through it. You can learn the facts, but you will never know the feelings and emotions. You can't know about living in a jungle, flying Chinooks, and using heroin unless you lived through it.

This is a common argument among Indians. There is the legal definition of an Indian, which is set up by each tribe and usually refers to ancestry and blood. For my tribe, the requirement is one quarter "Indian blood" and then the enrollment board decides if the person can be considered an Indian legally. In addition, most Indians feel that to be considered Indian you need to fit the cultural definition, which is fairly obvious. You need to identify with the culture, participate, and learn the traditions and values. Not only do I go back and forth about whether or not I really feel white or Indian, I also am conflicted with fitting the legal definition. I'm not sure about fitting the cultural definition because I don't know if I am "enough" Indian culturally. Do I belong to one group or the other? Do I belong to neither one? Maybe I belong to both?

But it is nearly impossible to belong to both cultures. Part of the reason is because of the ugly and deep history between the two groups that has left open wounds. There are so many things that can never be healed. Many Lakota believe that if they could get the Black Hills back all will be well. But I doubt it. Too much has changed. Native Americans, as a group (many feel that all of those diverse Indian cultures should not be in one group, but to make it simpler, I'm putting them in one) remain the least "assimilated" minority group in the U.S. This has been documented in countless texts. The history is not dead. I am where I am in spite of it, and as a result of it. I am a part of both cultures. I am the biological child of an Indian and a white person, yet how do I belong to two groups that are polar cultures?

This question arises in everyday interactions. White people label me Indian because they see the color of my skin, hair, and eyes. I am different from them visually and so I'm not usually considered one of them. Indian people label me white because they see that I do not share in their culture or know their traditions. I am an enrolled member in a tribe, but I will never be able to perform the sacred ceremonies because there is no one to guide me. Tribe members call me *Wasichu*, white person, and dismiss me. So I am different from them and not really one of them. I have received dirty looks from white people when I happened to be shopping around the time of the month that Indians are supposed to get welfare checks. It doesn't matter that welfare checks are not standard for Indians or that I would never get one anyway, I'm Indian to those people. I have been made fun of at a powwow by other kids who noticed I didn't know the dances or stories. I was so obviously white to them. It almost feels like a balance beam that I tediously walk, yet neither side would let me completely fall on their side to join them.

I admit, I'm not constantly conflicted with these differences. Most of the time, I am just Tanya Skar from Berthold, North Dakota. The rest of the world may be undecided on me, but my hometown community knows me, and they don't usually see me as any different from them. Not usually anyway. One of my friends even told a very racist joke the other day about Indians. I was hurt, but he didn't bat an eye and told me not to take it seriously because I'm not really like *those* Indians, I'm just like a white person. But it still hurts.

In my classes at school, however, I am always the token minority who bears the burden of representing all Indians to people who know me. When we learned about the way Indians were treated my classmates gave me sad faces and someone even apologized for Custer. I have to explain why Indians have tiny reservations when they used to belong to this whole continent. I try to explain their current economic situation. I don't know all the answers, but I'm expected to.

I'm also expected to make something great out of myself so I will be able to go back and save "my people." Do they know that many Indians don't feel they need to be saved? My friends are told to figure out what their passion is and follow it. They just have to find something that makes them happy. Not me. I am given the opportunity for a good education so I am told I should do something great to make everyone proud. I got the chance to get off the Rosebud reservation, the second poorest county in America behind its neighbor Pine Ridge, so I should take advantage of that and make a better life for Rosebud's residents who were not so fortunate. I don't want to feel like I have to live up to these expectations. Besides, Indians don't necessarily hold the same values that white people do. Most of them feel they are fine just where they are.

I'm not alone in this. There are many "mixed blooded" people

out there who are conflicted. Is it blood content or culture? What does it mean to be 15/32 Lakota Sioux? I was four when I first asked my sister why her skin was white and mine was brown. We were in Target, which was not where she wanted to explain it. My mom told me I was half white and half brown. As a child, I wondered which half was which. I was colored Indian but a white person underneath? Maybe it was blended, or layered. Mostly, I pictured little Indian dolls I had, with their headdresses, horses, bows and arrows, running around inside me, while other little white people, either chased or were chased by them. Of course, it was always 15 Indians to 17 whites. I still feel these people battling it out inside of me.

So what am I, and all the people who are not one or the other, to do? Maybe we should start a new nation without color lines, where everyone is equal, where race is seen for what it is: a social construction built by the dominant class. A nation where everyone would recognize that race is not biological or natural. When we all realize that race is constructed, there will be no prejudices and stereotypes. We will all be free to be ourselves and be one nation. We could retain our heritage and participate in others freely. We would mix together to form one body of very diverse peoples all striving for the same goals and ideals. We would be a melting pot.

Sound familiar? That's supposed to be America. In a way I am a product of melting together of two different parts, yet I am still asked to choose between religions and ideals. Do I celebrate Columbus Day or the anniversary of the death of Custer? Are George Washington and Thomas Jefferson my heroes, or is it Crazy Horse and Red Cloud? They were both fighting for the freedom of their people. They were just different people.

In this great melting pot, I am different from everyone around me and am forced to deal with that fact often. My sister thinks I am lucky because I get to pick which one I want to be. She envies all the opportunities I have as an Indian and as a white. She tells me that I see more than my peers do. Because I see two different worlds, I am more open-minded. But my two worlds conflict. They have different views and ideals and history has proven that they cannot easily coexist. So what does that mean for me?



Erienne Graten

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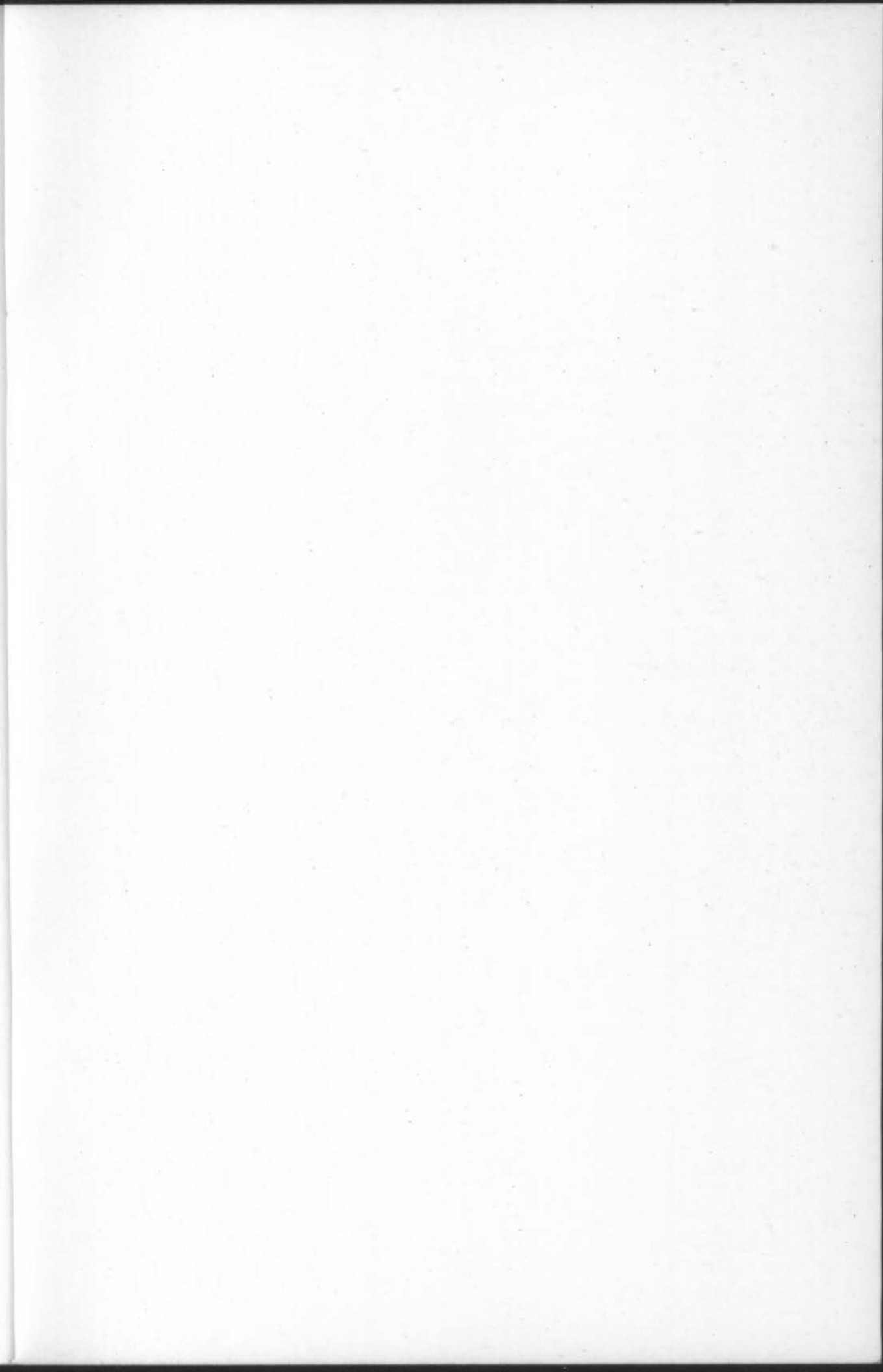
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