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Catron Grieves

INDIAN CAR

Driving to the Winnebago pow-wow, across Iowa in the August evening
we have left Iowa City in an “Indian Car.” You probably know the type,
good transmission, bald tires, cracked windshield, Janet Jackson on the
radio,
the kids’ dance clothes, handbeaded vests and moccasins safe in the
trunk.

I have been very homesick, so Janelle said, “you better come stay
with my family, and go to the pow-wow.”
So, we are in the car talking about becoming more like the people
at home, the closer we get—we take off our educated voices,
we talk about alcoholic fathers, too many people who need the too
few jobs
on the reservation, babies born to highschool mothers, and we talk
about losing the native languages. “How do you say that.” We have
asked
our mothers, and too many times they say, “Oh,
I used to know that, but I can’t remember anymore.”

She tells me her name is Wau Sau Nu Qua,
Sunlight Shining Through The Storm Clouds.
She tells me her grandmother named her on the fourth day.
Halfway between Des Moines and Omaha at 10:45 P.M. we stop
at an all night truckstop. —You know the drill—gas, pee,
stuff for the kids to eat. We don’t leave the kids asleep
alone in the car so we take turns
going in, the attendant is a woman, older, one trucker talking to his
wife
on the telephone, and five local types drive up in an old car. Look like
trouble about to happen, pretty soon.

We are two women aware that because we are “Indian women”
with babies in the car, trouble could come.
When they stood too close, we left without food.

With the truckstop, "WE STAY OPEN ALL NIGHT" in the rearview mirror,
we talk again, this time it's "why is it that you can go to college,
and no matter how many VISA cards you carry, sometimes you don't
feel
free to use them in the middle of America."

We pay the toll across the bridge into Nebraska,
a deer crosses our headlights, before we pull into the driveway,
the porchlight comes on.
We are home and it is after one A.M. We stay up to talk.
We play a video. Little sister has just graduated from Marine
training in South Carolina. In her uniform she is a warrior,
in the tradition of warriors.
In the hot Carolina sun she is proud, we see her resolve,
she will keep the country safe. Her mother talks
about her highschool days. How all the girls went to college.
And we sleep.

At breakfast, the men at the table are speaking of Viet Nam, and Ko-
rea,
about honor and dishonor, and the old traditions, corn soup, and the
dances
and giveaways, to honor the war dead.

In the afternoon we women go to the mall in Sioux City,
for a perm, and to shop at Sears. Eat Chinese food.
Representatives of all the branches of the military
are at the dance. I like the jingle dances almost as much
as the squaw dance. And Sunday night we are on our way back
to Iowa City, from Native land. I worry
that we will not find a safe stop
to gas up this "Indian Car."