Reservation School for Girls

BY DIANE GLANCY

I.
We hang clothes on the line.
His wide trousers and shirt, wind-beat,
roar small thunder from one prairie cloud.

The same rattle of flag on its pole.

Half in fear, half in jest, we laugh.
He calls us crow women.
Our black hair shines in the sun
and in the light from school windows.

He drives his car to town, upsets the dust
on buckboard hills.
We sit on the fence when he is gone.
Does he know we speak of thunder in his shirts?

We cannot do well in his school.
He reads from west to east,
The sun we follow moves the other way.

Crowbar.

Our eyes come loose from words on the page
in narrow rooms of the reservation school.
He perceives and deciphers at once.

For us
written letters will not stay on the page,
but fall like crows from the sky and hit
against the glass windows of the school.

Our day is night when we sit in rows of the classroom.
Leaves in a whirlwind from sumac groves.
Flock of crows are black starts on a white night.

II.
On the porch of the reservation school
the blackbirds walk around our feet,
fly into our head.
They call our secret name.

Dark corridors linger in our mind
We whisper the plains to one another.
We do not talk of what we cannot understand.
Black and white fleckered dresses.

Our face like our fathers.

The sun is no enemy to the eye looking west.
The brush thin as hair of old ones.

It blinds the eye, makes fire on fields,
flashes against windows like silver ribbons
on burial robes.

Hot late into the fall, windy, ready for
cold to sweep in.
The heat seems solid, but totters on the brink
of winter.

We laugh to ourselves when he returns to the
reservation school for girls.
Take his clothes from the line.
Set the table with salt and pepper, spoon, knives.
Cattails and milk-pods in a jar.

We get lard from the basement,
rub a place in the dusty window like a moon in the ancient sky.

III.
One hill larger than the others:
an old buffalo with heavy head and whiskers
nods at the ground,
grazes in my dreams, one blade at a time.

We stay in our stiff white-sheeted beds in the
dormitory room.
Buffalo wander in our dreams.

White night-dresses.
Black pods suspended in sumac groves like crows.

In the sweat lodge of sleep
we make our vision quest,
black as pitch in crevice between crow feathers.

We hang his thunder clothes in sleep,
arms reach above our beds like willows blowing slowly
by the creek.

Quietly we choke,
hold our wounded arms like papooses.

Clothes beat on lines.
Sumac groves and whirl of leaves:
a shadow of our fathers at council fires.
Red leaves, waxy as hay on fields.
We dream of schoolrooms.

Written letters on the wind.

He reads crow-marks on the page but does not know
crow.

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