

CRAZY HORSE DREAMS

SHE TRIED TO STAND close to Victor at the fry bread stand, but he moved from open space to open space, between the other Indians eating and drinking, while he hoped the Blackfoot waitress would finally take his order. When he grew tired of the chase, he turned to leave and she was standing there.

“They don’t pay you any mind because your hair is too short,” she said.

She’s too short to be this honest, he thought. Her braids reach down to her waist, but on a tall woman they would be simple, insignificant. She’s wearing a fifty-dollar ribbon shirt manufactured by a company in Spokane. He’d read about the Indian grandmother who designs them, each an original, before she sells them for a standard operating fee. He remembered the redheaded bank teller who cashed his check and asked him if he thought her shirt was authentic. Authentic. He stared at this small Indian woman standing in his way and walked past her.

“Hey, One-Braid,” she called after him. “Too good for me?”

“No,” he said. “Too big.”

He walked away, through the sawchips spread over the ground to keep the dust down, down to the stickgame pavilion.

He was surprised to see Willie Boyd holding the bones, making gas money for the ride to the next powwow. He dug into his pockets, found a five-dollar bill, and threw it in with Willie. Willie shifted the bones from hand to hand, a Native magician working without mirrors, his hand an inch quicker than the eyes of the old woman sitting on the other side, trying to find the bone with the colored band. The old woman laughed when she guessed wrong, threw a few crumpled bills into the dirt in front of Willie.

“Let it ride all night, Willie,” Victor said. “I ain’t going nowhere.”

It was only the first night of the powwow, everyone had money in their pockets. A five-dollar bill couldn’t mean a thing until the end, when the last van heading out of Browning or Poplar had room for only one more. Willie Boyd drove an RV with a television and a refrigerator, with a sunroof that took in all the air. When it mattered, Victor thought, Willie Boyd would remember that five dollars. Willie Boyd always remembered.

She was standing behind him, again, when he turned to leave.

“You must be a rich man,” she said. “Not much of a warrior, though. You keep letting me sneak up on you.”

“You don’t surprise me,” he said. “The Plains Indians had women who rode their horses eighteen hours a day. They could

shoot seven arrows consecutively, have them all in the air at the same time. They were the best light cavalry in the history of the world.”

“Just my luck,” she said. “An educated Indian.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Reservation University.”

They both laughed at the old joke. Every Indian is an alumnus.

“Where you from?” she asked.

“Wellpinit,” he said. “I’m a Spokane.”

“I should’ve known. You got those fisherman’s hands.”

“Ain’t no salmon left in our river. Just a school bus and a few hundred basketballs.”

“What the hell you talking about?”

“Our basketball team drives into the river and drowns every year,” he said. “It’s tradition.”

She laughed. “You’re just a storyteller, ain’t you?”

“I’m just telling you things before they happen,” he said. “The same things sons and daughters will tell your mothers and fathers.”

“Do you ever answer a question straight?”

“Depends on the question,” he said.

“Do you want to be my powwow paradise?”

She took him back to her Winnebago. In the dark, on the

plastic mattress, she touched his soft belly. His hands moved over her, fancydancers, each going farther away from his body. He was shaking.

“What are you scared of?” she asked.

“Elevators, escalators, revolving doors. Any kind of forced movement.”

“You don’t have to worry about those kind of things at a powwow.”

“That’s not true,” he said. “We had an Indian conference at the Sheraton Hotel in Spokane last winter. About twenty of us crowded into an elevator to go up to my room and we got stuck between the twelfth and fourteenth floors. Twenty Indians and a little old white elevator man having a heart attack.”

“You’re lying,” she said. “You stole that story.”

“What scares you?” he asked. She was quiet. She stared hard at him, trying to find his features among the shadows, formed a picture of him in her mind. But she was wrong. His hair was thinner, more brown than black. His hands were small. Somehow she was still waiting for Crazy Horse.

“I have this dream about playing bingo,” she said. “It’s a million-dollar blackout and I only need B-6. But the caller announces B-7 and everyone else in the whole damn place is yelling out, *Bingo!*”

“Sounds more like the truth to me,” he said as she reached across him and turned on the light.

Victor was surprised. She had grown. She was the most enormous woman he had ever seen. Her hair fell down over her body, an explosion of horses. She was more beautiful than he wanted, more of a child of freeway exits and cable television, a mother to the children who waited outside 7-11 asking him to buy them a case of Coors Light. She sat on the bus traveling uptown to a community college. She sat on the bus traveling toward cities that grew, doubled. There was nothing he could give her father to earn her hand, nothing she would understand, remember.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, reaching for the light again, but he stopped her, held her wrist tightly, painfully.

“Why don’t you have any scars?” he asked, pulling her face close to his, her braids touching his chest.

“Why do you have so fucking many?” she asked him.

Then she was afraid of the man naked beside her, under her, afraid of that man who was simple in clothes and cowboy boots, a feather in a bottle.

“You’re nothing important,” he said. “You’re just another goddamned Indian like me.”

“Wrong,” she said, twisting from his grip and sitting up, her
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arms crossed over her chest. "I'm the best kind of Indian and I'm in bed with my father."

He laughed. She was silent. She thought she could be saved. She thought he could take her hand and owldance her around the circle. She thought she could watch him fancydance, watch his calf muscles grow more and more perfect with each step. She thought he was Crazy Horse.

He got up, pulled on his Levi's, buttoned his red-and-black flannel shirt, the kind some writer called an Indian shirt. He stepped into his cowboy boots, opened the tiny refrigerator, and grabbed a beer.

"You're nothing. You're nothing," he said and left.

Standing in the dark, next to a tipi with blue smoke escaping from the fire inside, he watched the Winnebago. For hours, Victor watched the lights go on and off, on and off. He wished he was Crazy Horse.