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Buckskin Curtain

As academia goes
We find information here and there
Piecing it together
as one does a starquilt

Each piece brings
thought and art into
a work of beauty

The tiny stitches representing
all the trips to the library
Only to find that one issue missing
and it was a reminder of
how a prick in your finger
Likens to the pen in hand

Elusive titles are like
seeking the Buckskin Curtain
How fanciful that sounds
It's probably good reading

And if that book is ever found
That curtain
will give a story well told
And the colors in the star of the quilt
will shine ever more brightly

—*Vee Salabiye*

Vee Salabiye, a Navajo from Lower Greasewood, Arizona, is a librarian in the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA.

Dancing

For Toby and Mike

I

This morning I heard the birds
fluttering about and singing their
own kind of songs

It reminded me of you
Of how you make your own special music
You do it by your dance
Oh how you lift your moccasined feet

All that turquoise and silver
moving in tune with you
Your body moves in rhythm
with the earth and sky
Your eyes dance and
show a special star-eyed look
As you smile into those
who applaud you

You give a special pride to
the land you come from
One of earth and sky
And with your dancing
You give it that special grace
That only your dancing
deserves that special applause

II

When I think of you and powwow dancing
My heart glows
As your legs move to the beat of the drum
and you bow to honor the
notes of its resonance
You come alive as at no other time
Those moccasins sure take a beating
Just like the drumsticks

Mother Earth is beneath you
and you honor her with your gentle footsteps

You tread ever so lightly
Just because the melody carries you
into the night

And when the powwow is over
You meet family and friends again
in the wide circle you created

Just because you danced a good one

—*Vee Salabiye*

Always Remember Where You Come From

Like the circle in the basket
Your life is intertwined

And through the richness and beauty of the design
Lies the memory of your Grandfather

Let me tell you about your Grandpa

He would've cupped your chin in his hand
and whispered his special love for you

Yes, each of you is special
Smiles brushed with feathers
Dark eyes sprinkled with dewdrops
Brown skin like our Mother Earth

Grandpa was a master and when he talked
not just to say this way and that way
as we Navajos tend to do

But he told stories that were
good enough to settle the mutton stew
and the breakfast of spam and eggs
and let's not forget the fresh hot tortillas

When you crave that mutton and even that spam
You see, you're part of Grandpa
and part of Navajo country

And that's why
When I see you smile
I know you were brushed with Grandpa's feather

In a very special way

—Vee Salabiye

Greasewood

Thirty miles south
On the road from Canyon De Chelly
to Hubbell's Trading Post
Is the place
I call my home

It's not much
named after greasewood
a type of weed
it's not a place like Window Rock

But Greasewood has its own beauty
Nestled between two picturesque orange tinted mesas
And with a part of the powerful Colorado River running through it
we just call it the wash

But that wash holds special memories
It could get mean when the River shared its water
more than usual
and we would slip and slide
just to get to the other side

And usually just to meet some others to share stories
But really, it was to share some fresh mutton ribs with tortillas
and chili

Washed down with day old coffee
that had settled good
just like the wash

—Vee Salabiye

For Jacob

When I first saw you
You were the gleam of your father's eyes
He was so proud to show you off
And now I know why

Those brown mounded cheeks
Tell of how you are grounded to the color of Mother Earth

And the skies gave you a special star dust look in your eyes
Because it was a special gift from our Father Sky

As you go forth I know you will do so with your grandfather's
blessings
Remembering that cradle you had
Beaded in a special way
Just for you

—*Vee Salabiye*

My Ca-Boy

I thought you looked familiar
I recognized those faded Levis covering your poor ole flat
Indian ass
And the cowboy boots with the slits down the middle

How we used to two step and give them a work out
You held me close and called me "shi gir"

But at the 49 it didn't matter what your jeans
or your boots looked like

When you sang that song
the one you said was just for me

Then I realized it was just another song about a one-eyed Ford
Not like the shiny new one
you said would someday be mine

Instead you picked me up
In that '56 Chevy
with vinyl seat covers that made me sweat

When you were sweet
and our hearts did their own two step

—*Vee Salabiye*

Beware of Hairy Indian Men

I still wonder how, after all these years
You were able to crawl under my skin
And stay there, damn you!
I wish I'd been a Sioux with a teepee so I could pack up and go
But no, I had to be Navajo with a hogan with no get up and go

You promised me the moon and stars

The only moon I saw was your bare assed behind
and the starry look
after my Visa card paid for it all

I was going to be an Eagle Hawk
We'd made plans, you and I

What laughter rang within me back then
How I thought everything would be okay

I should have known that an Indian man who had to shave
Was hairy in more ways than one

—*Vee Salabiye*