

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Literature

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6814x77t>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 24(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2000-06-01

DOI

10.17953

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Abhoo* Song

Against his bare brown chest,
the man cradles his newborn son,
wrapped in a soft star quilt.

Each star cut and sewn
by his mother's hand from bits
of fabric salvaged

from his grandmother's red
shawl, his father's plaid flannel shirt,
his sister's flowered dress.

With his fingertips, the father
gently drums on his infant's back,
hums slumbering notes

lured from an ancestor's soul
where light and color shimmer
like a trout's rainbow

as it bends between rock
and stream, where the spirits
of father and son drift

away together into the dreamy
shapes of white buffalo clouds
floating across a sky blue prairie.

**Abhoo* is the Lakota word for sleep.

—*Katrina Gonzales*

Katrina Gonzales (Fort Peck Sioux) writes fiction and poetry influenced by her bicultural heritage. She spent part of her childhood in Montana before moving to Washington State, where she has lived for most of her life.

Broken Wing

*Touches the Clouds,
Bumblebee,
Burnt Soldier,
Bird with a Broken Wing.*

Their names
are like feathers and bones
strung from branches
in a leafless tree.

We say their names
when we turn the pages of our family album,
say how strange they sound to us,
but our elders can remember

the fathers who stepped out
of the tipi with a newborn in their arms
to hold up to the sky like an offering,
prayed for a name.

One father, who stood on top
of a mountain, could touch the clouds.
Another chased with his eyes a bumblebee
as it gathered nectar from pink wild roses.

One saw the blue soldier smolder
at the stake of war. Another watched
an eagle with a broken wing
try to fly.

—*Katrina Gonzales*

Buffalo Hunt in Four Directions

This warrior owns no horse.
Buffalo no longer roam the land to hunt.
Yet he rises before the sun, packs his lunch,
ties his leather shoe laces.

In a gray automobile named after a wild horse,
he rides east to build a warehouse to hold an acre
of canned goods and tires stacked to the ceiling.

He's traveled south before where he riveted
steel to sheet metal, constructed a machine to chew
wood chips for newsprint and rolls of toilet paper.

He's also journeyed west and while tethered to a rope
he scaled a steep ravine, nailed forms to bridge a remote
Indian reservation to the modern world.

To the north he chopped down trees from the green
rain forest to clear a trail to pour concrete into foundation
for a rich man's log cabin retreat.

Tonight on his way home he will buy pork chops
wrapped in clear plastic and a six pack of beer.
His wife will barbecue the meat over charcoal briquettes.

For dessert she'll spray whipped cream
from a red and white aerosol can on strawberries
she picked from their tiny garden spot
in their fenced yard.

—*Katrina Gonzales*

Splinters

the shattering of light
is eaten by the shadows
that crouch in dark alleys
and welder-walk the tangled
ribs of steel

and a three-legged dog
drags a chair leg to the
curb, starving on mahogany
and varnish, he offers me
a meal of splinters

our ribs thin as parchment,
we dine, our backs to the
brownstone steps while
shadows lap the drops of
resin falling at our feet

—*Cheyenne Stoneheart*

Cheyenne Stoneheart and her husband are retired and live in Montana on the Flathead Indian Reservation, which was opened to homesteaders in the early 1900s, creating a diverse mix of tribal and non-tribal residents who often struggle to understand each other's cultures. Stoneheart's poetry is an attempt to understand that struggle.

Furrows

the shambler moves
without feet, roiling
furrows of wine bottle
glass he harrows the
gutters

soft ashy hues of moth
dust clot the air, a
rippling that stirs
furtively in the
shambler's wake

—*Cheyenne Stoneheart*

Siren Song

the city wears a
shawl bespangled
with bisque coins,
abalone threads
trailing ragged
on the hem

her siren song
more terrible than
the desolate singing
of machinery in the
silence of my dreams

—*Cheyenne Stoneheart*

Pastels Swimming Together

It was either the Star Trek convention or this—
a real coin tosser...

but you heard great-great grandma might've had a little
Cherokee
so you came on down.

Welcome to the Powwow.

C'mon. Tell me to my face how great-great grandmother
escaped from the trail of tears into...

Louisiana...

Indiana...

Kentucky...

Anywhere USA

How miss fictional 1888 married a white man whose family
didn't approve.
Mama always said there was a reason she made little Indian
chief heads in ceramics
pastels swimming together on your dresser.

—Erika T. Wurth

Erika T. Wurth (Apache/Chickasaw/Cherokee/Anglo) is a twenty-four-year-old Indian woman from Colorado, although she has lived in different places from time to time. Currently she is a graduate student in English at the University of Colorado.

Raven Gets a Kick Out of You

Tattered Omen
black wings bared
outstretched in morbid beauty,
you move like the withered arms of an Indian man
on an Urban Indian Sunday.

Eater of dead things
trickster or saint...

depending on your point of view...

his from high above...

with wings so oily...

following me peripherally with traditional length hair.

Your face
shadowed
like the face of an Indian girl
dreaming in the dust near the local K-Mart.

Are you white or indian?
I can't see through this darkness...

Scraping through these city streets
your wings touch the cement
with all the power
of one brown arm caressing another.

Today, a white man.
Tomorrow, eternity.

You say you want to be my lover
but do you want my indian blood
or my white?

I know you want blood...

and everywhere I look, blood...

And on the rooftop
I find you
in the twilight downtown
broken
passed out
after the best damn 49 in history.