

Crazy Horse Speaks

I
I discovered the evidence
in a vault of the Mormon Church
3,000 skeletons of my cousins
in a silence so great
I built four walls around it
and gave it a name.
I called it Custer
and he came to me
again in a dream.
He forgave all my sins.

II

Little Big Horn.
 Little Big Horn does not belong to me.
 I was there
 my horse exploded beneath me.
 I searched for Long Hair
 the man you call Custer
 the man I call My Father.
 But it wasn't me who killed him
 it was ———
 who poked holes in Custer's ears
 and left the body for proof.
 I dream of him
 and search doorways and alleys
 for his grave.
 General George Armstrong Custer
 my heart is beating
 survive survive survive.

III

I wear the color of my skin
 like a brown paper bag
 wrapped around a bottle.
 Sleeping between
 the pages of dictionaries
 your language cuts
 tears holes in my tongue
 until I do not have strength
 to use the word *Love*.
 What could it mean
 in this city where everyone is
 Afraid-of-Horses?

IV

There are places I cannot leave.
 Rooms without doors or windows
 the eternal rib cage.
 I sat across the fire
 from Sitting Bull
 shared smoke and eyes.
 We both saw the same thing
 our futures tight and small

an 8 × 10 dream
called the reservation.
We had no alternatives
but to fight again and again
live our lives on horseback.
After the Civil War
the number of Indian warriors
in the West doubled
tripled the number of soldiers
but Indians never have shared
the exact skin
never the same home.

V
I am the mirror
practicing masks
and definitions.
I have always wanted to be anonymous
instead of the crazy skin
who rode his horse backward
and lay down alone.
It was never easy
to be frightened
by the sound of a color.
I can still hear white
it is the sound
of glass shattering.

VI
I hear the verdict
in the museum in New York
where five Eskimo were flown in
to be a living exhibit.
Three died within days
lacking natural immunity
their hearts miles
and miles of thin ice.
The three dead Eskimo
were stuffed and mounted
hunched over a fishing hole
next to the two living
who held their thin hands

close to their chests
mortal and sinless.

VII

Whenever it all begins again
I will be waiting.

Sherman Alexie

Powwow Polaroid

We were fancydancing, you see.

Step-step, right foot, step-step, left foot, faster, twisting, turning, spinning, changing.

There are photographs taken but only one ever captured the change. It was a white tourist from Spokane. She was lucky, she was quick, maybe it was film developed by the CIA.

She took the picture, the flashbulb burned, and none of us could move. I was frozen between steps, my right foot three inches off the ground, my mouth open and waiting to finish the last sound.

The crowd panicked. Most fled the stands, left the dancers not dancing and afraid. The white woman with the camera raised her arms in triumph, crossed her legs at the ankle, tilted her head to one side.

My four-hundred-pound aunt wept into the public address system. My uncle held his great belly in his hands, walked among the fancydancers, said this:

forgiveness.

Sherman Alexie