REMEMBER THE WIND

deCoy Gallerina

Hissing through a partially opened window in a small house on a knoll, in a tiny Oklahoma town; the wind. A young willow in the side yard, baby me, climbing this tiny tree and standing beneath the protective curve of its branches, just big enough for my five year old body.

I never go into the cellar or ever play on the steps above, it is black down there, dark, like a cavern, like a trap or someplace inside myself I don't yet know. Maybe spiders live there, maybe a black widow. I race by the darkness to the trees and long grasses, the bugs and fantasy. Sticks clothed in cloth scraps, rocks converse, chess pieces move by my hand, ants and anthill worlds.

I find horned toads, put them in bottles, to at last escape or die. I scratch chigger bites, watching those lizard's stillness, waiting for soup and for the heat of the day to diminish, waiting for the stars and coolness to come.

Hot, so hot the soup won't stay down.

Laying in the back room on a soft mattress, two narrow beds here and an antique treadle sewing machine.

Old Man dying in the other room.

I always enter the back way. This room, the porch, is coolest in the heat of the Plain's day, which makes me sick, unable to eat, the heat, I sleep.

Grandma is in the kitchen making scrambled eggs and toast for she, myself and her aunt and uncle. Old Man lays on the bed in the front room covered with Pendleton blankets and old wool army blankets. He doesn't feel the heat like my young body does.

Hot, so hot the food won't stay down.

I'm here, in this house at two years of age and three, four, five and six and I will be here when I'm fifteen and twenty-two.

At night grandma battles the cockroaches with bleach and rubber gloves. Though there's nothing for them, they cover the cabinets, sink and floor. Sometimes she finds one in the empty ice-box, where once they put blocks of ice.

I sleep between bus-sick trips to the bathroom, recovering from our three day and night greyhound bus ride from California. She runs water for me to soak in, to ease the fever of the day. She wants to feed me to keep me well. Every summer I loose weight in this house where every year Old Lady and Old Man grow older, in this house where eventually grandma has a stroke trying to care of her alcoholic, schizophrenic son. This house is where my favorite cousin overdoses on Vodka. This house full of the voice of personal, family and tribal history.

Old Lady wears a bandanna on an almost bald head. I don't remember ever having seen hair on her head. She plays poker and cusses loudly in Apache, an everyday ritual with the black neighbor Sweets and some other friends.

Sweets and his wife, who live next door, share the aging. Sweet deals the cards, Old Lady wins, again. Sweet is here when I return in ten years, but Ol' Lady Bessie is not.

She always wins, this "rich" one, harsh and silent when young, striding to the drug store to buy a hot day Sunday. My aunt's favorite aunt.

Every year I'm here to hear her cuss. Now, her wirey, brown, ninety year old face is age speckled and snickering with wrinkles.

Just once, grandma and I sleep in the front room across from the Pendleton covered bed, I dream of cedar.

Always with grandma, I am never separate from her, the old and young sleeping together, dreaming together, the same dream of cedar.

Grandma heard an owl call a taxi for her one night when she was a young nurse and mother, as she crossed the railroad tracks on her way to work. She said that the owl said "Taxi, Taxi!" She was frightened and hurried on.

At the "Indian" fair in Anadarko, I walk around and around the circle of rides, with all the other Indian kids, and on the dance grounds, with cousins and uncles.

Never with grandpa, he only teases maliciously, saying things I don't understand in ways I can't comprehend.

At my cousin plays war with rubber soldiers, the enemy is the ant colony in the yard. He sets fire to the soldiers then tosses them onto the hill, burning scattering ants, I watch.

I wrestle with him until he screams for his mother "Get her off of me!!!" I'm six he's twelve, I love him. I'm a pest and I'm bugging him until she comes, or he runs away leaving me with burnt soldiers and charred ants.

The dirt is red, the day hot, it rains while the sun is out, pavement burns my bare feet. My girl cousin and I dart from patches of grass to fence logs and puddles whose waters break the scalding heat of pavement into steaming imaginings. We are on our way to get Frosties, cold icy ice cream in cones, to lick and make a mess with.

Grandpa shows me a whale bone necklace, dangling it in front of me, letting me hold it, asking if I like it. Then, abruptly snatches it away from me giving it to my cousin, his favorite grandchild, who is standing next to me. She has long, pitch black hair and brown skin, like him. I have red hair and honey colored skin. I guess he thinks I'm spoiled, or maybe it's because of my white skin and long red hair. Or maybe he's just mean.

Beneath the air conditioner, in my aunt's trailer house, I sit trying to cool the tears and that his meaness brought to my eyes and the sweat the heat brings. I wait for grandma, the safety of her, I wait for her to come and pick me up.

At Old Man and Old Lady's house I lay listening to the wind hissing through the wire mesh covering the window. The window is cracked a few inches, the air coming through it is dusty. I need the air, I lay on the bed, the window is next to it, I put my nose to the space where the wind is coming in, I breathe deeply. I need air, the air is dusty and even when I breathe it, I feel like I'm not getting enough. I don't know that I have asthma and that the dusty air is closing my lungs so no oxegen can get in…grandma doesn't know this either. So, I breathe and breathe and still need air.

I lay in that back room on my little bed, thinking of pretty reddish-brown eyes of a pretty brown boy, we are now 15. I met him at the fairgrounds. So pretty. Now he's in the little town jail, behind bars for drunkenness, sweaty and smelling like sweet and wild youth, like stirring Cache County dust. The big white sheriff laughs gently, teasing the two teenage lovers, who kiss, in heat; the heat.

Grandma leaves me and that pretty boy in the backyard, in the back room. The two of us watch stars from behind the barn, beneath the grapevines, between blankets in the grass, holding each other, holding the day's heat in the cool dark, wondering if the neighbors across the metal fence can see us.

He is my second lover and leaves marks on my neck to take home. His reddish-brown eyes say good bye from the other side of the front fence. It's like pulling a soul away from itself. These eyes do not part.

I wave over the fence; he must go before my aunt comes. Grandma must be watching, she knows, that what is happening is the spirit of this place. The touch could have been Old Lady and Old Man when they were young, as if the house once again needed to feel fire, it set fire to us.

This boy calls me much later, when I am in my twenties, when I live with my other aunt, in some place far, far away from here. A voice from the past, the long gone past.

Grandma makes breakfast, eggs and toast, something light to sit in the stomach of her girl, whom she never angered with, though she wonders at my sadness. A grief she can not comprehend. The cause of this grief, her leaving me to come here and live permanently, leaving me in the city a thousand miles away with a mother who is wrecked, who offers no solace or protection to a young vulnerable girl.

Grandma the person I was never separate from, a mother to me, now only miles and long lonely miles of separation and deep abandonment inside me.

She wondered at my sadness, not understanding just as I wondered at her blindness, insisting on calling for that "no good" abusive man of hers even in her years of senility, at age eighty, she still calling to him, saying his name yearningly.

Like I say hers all these years in poems and stories and dreams and projections...calling her back to me, her love, her protection.

Sitting here, I listen to the hissing of wind through the opened window and wire mesh.
It is her song, calling me to her today,

Reminding me of her love for me.

DECOY GALLERINA: SHORT BIO 2022

STATUS & ORIGINS: Rebel Irish/Chiricahua Nde' (Chakonen, 'Fort Sill' Apache; the group Geronimo & Cochise are from), Matriarch/Elder, Culture Bearer, Two-Spirit, Cross-Platform/Cross-Genre Life Long Artivist & direct descendant of Cochise
Raised in San Francisco/New Mexico/Apache/Oklahoma
STYLES: Psychedelic Stomp to Deep Traditional works
GENRES: Beadwork master, costuming, painter, installation and performance art, video, lyricist, composer, writer, performance artist, actress, singer, dancer, visual artist, perpetual student
MEMBER: Chiricahua Warm-Springs Nde' (Apache) Tribe of New Mexico, Theatre Movement International, Radical Medicine, Idle No More, Member/Curator Komotion Int'l SF, more…
TRAINING: Nde' ceremonies, several decades study and research in Chiricahua cultural aspects with Tribal Historian, Cultural Expert, Linguist & tribal member; Leland Michael Darrow, extensive private training in music, dance, arts & training with Nde' Grandmother Minnie Nicholas in writing, beadwork, painting and with mother Caroline and aunt & Mary Zurega in costuming, music appreciation and San Francisco 'Live Culture'
INFLUENCES/TEACHERS: diverse Bay Area culture, Leland Michael Darrow, Jill Parker, Rene Yanez, BadUnklSista, Rudradeep Chakrabarti, Charles Justin Hoover, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Janeen Antione; American Indian Contemporary Arts Gallery, Black Panthers and their artist; Emory Douglas, American Indian Movement and Richard Oakes, AIM WEST; Tony Gonzales, La Pena, Standing Rock Red Warrior Camp, Pennie Opal Plant & Isabella Zizi; Idle No More, Upward Bound, Oakland Intertribal FreindshipHouse, Leonard Peltier, Alanon, Ceremony, David Solnit, Norm Sands, Annie Sprinkle, Malaquias Montoya, Juanita Barry, Phil Foss, Santa Fe Opera, Steven Paul Judd, American Indian Film Festival SF, BAAITS Powwow, First Nation/Indigenous culture and struggles far and wide, many more teachers and inspirations
BFA DEGREES: San Francisco Art Institute, California College of the Arts, College of Santa Fe, Institute of American Indian Arts
PRESENTATIONS: San Francisco International Arts Festival, Allan Houser Garden Gallery, Santa Fe, Studio 23, Alameda; Displacement Show, High Street Gallery London, deYoung Museum, IAIA Museum, POWPOWPOW SF, REAL FACES interviews of 500 artivists (youtube), Playwriter/performer of "Homecoming" Chiricahua Nde' Apache Odyssey' and 'Haunting Our His&Herstories; Indigenous Children's Boarding School Experiences', Yerba Buena Gardens First Nation Festival, Berkeley World Music Festival, Ivy Room, Venice Biennale, Counter Pulse Theater, San Francisco Independent Arts Festival, United States Arts and Crafts Board, La Pena, Stork Club, Galeria de la Raza, San Francisco Art Institute,
many more…

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