Poem in Two Parts

Shelly Sanders

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Poem in Two Parts

THE SKETCH THING

When he sketched
It wasn't like the world disappeared
It was more like the thing inside
That made him want to
Stab the goldfishes' eyes with the tooth-market pencil
And watch them bleed tiny flopping deaths
Across the tabletop

Instead

Crawled out onto his page
Quirking the corners of the Blackfeet woman's mouth
Hooking the bull-elk's antler tips
Content then, smirking up at him.

The thing had even squirmed onto
The Jesus-picture his mother had cooed over
And crucified on the refrigerator door with magnet-nails.

She startled once, after a few minutes'
Deep study of the Jesus-picture.
He'd drawn the eyes unopened
And the something that snickered between the closed lids
Peeked after you'd stared awhile.

He knew that.
But he didn’t tell her that sometimes,
When the Jesus-eyes opened to him
They narrowed
Searching for the tooth-pocked pencil
He held tight behind his back.

ACTIVITIES: NONE

Screwing the old woman was like
Doing it with a box of dusty Kleenex
I was high on incredibly good shit
And her house looked good from
Outside in the dog-pissed drifts.

They found her blood
Trailed it to me
So I spent some time in the cell next to Vern
Underneath the whole fucking courthouse
Of Conrad, Montana
Had my sketch-book and a chewed-up pencil.
They all scrambled above me,
Fat white grubs.

Third or fourth day
Vern’s girlfriend pulls a .357 Magnum
On the dispatcher and that fat-ass deputy and
Vern says “You comin’?”
So I picked up my sketches and went
Laughing, ready for a road-trip.

Her beat-up Datsun leaked air at eighty
Vern drove, I rode shotgun
Just like some fucking F.B.I. show.
she crawled small in a corner
Didn’t say much, looked scared
Like the dispatcher when the Mag. was up her snout.
The Datsun got us to the reservation that night,
Pulled over five miles south of Babb.
Under the nosy bastard moon
I got a good tight grip on her throat
Bandanna-gagged her

And she spread her legs for me then
While Vern slept in the front seat
Cradling the Magnum instead of her.

She screamed like I'd killed her
When I took off the gag
Vern woke up and I made it out the door and
One
Two-three
Lurchy steps
Before the bullet gnawed
My ribs
Sat back
While five more followed.

Sprawled out now, face-down
So cold
The snow's sucking mouthfuls of my blood
Red on white
Red on red, and
It isn't funny anymore

Until
I think about all those dumb
White kids who'll be amazed
they walked the same halls with
a genuine bad-ass Injun.

And the girls' faces, pale
Like when they're swimming
In five feet of water at Tiber Dam
And a rattler curves past their thighs
Yeah, that's me
can't even see the goddamn stars

But
White boy on the sand
Pitches a rock, pegging
my back   my head

and the rattler sinks
slowly into dark

Snow-cold water

And touches bottom
But doesn't
Know it