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Vision Test

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DANA SONNENSCHNEIN

Vision Test

Grandpa left Pine Ridge *in the dust*,
hands shaking, nerves shot, forgetting
his hospital whites and new eye-charts.

As Grandma talks, I remember the story
of a healer who saw too many
wounded—Mary turned into a grizzly

digging bullets from wounded Cheyenne.
Called Standing Soldier for her medicine,
she growled men back to life again.

The Indian Service sent a nurse
to drive their eye doctor back East
for a rest. *Is this clearer or this?*

Grandma followed with the kids.
Years later, with dishes, linen, and dogs,
she trailed him from res to res—

Still, Bear Mary kept appearing, blurred,
in the corner, when he treated
another squaw. She turned his head.

Over the years, he kept an album,
women pictured in native costume,
identified by tribe instead of name.

Paiute, Shoshone, Arapaho.
Too full of fight, no Sioux
stood still for him. A shadow

moves across the border
when I hear my aunt and grandmother
go on about Indians around here—

*They drink, do drugs, beat their wives.
A couple killed their own child.*
I have to close my eyes

to say *violence is at home everywhere.*
They turn to the window and stare
out as if seeing things in the dark.

Hunched over the table, biting
my tongue, I feel something coming
over me, cold claws, bear skin.