

FRANCIS NARCISE BAPTISTE / Poems

Blood

his father had a moustache
for his mother, he imagined, it must've
been like kissing the branch of a pine tree
or the end of a broom

always wandering off
away from his friends
he seemed more at ease alone

Jerm, an older cousin, once asked him
if he was a full-blooded Indian and
not yet understanding race or biology
he said, *Probably not, there was that
time my nose bled a lot
and I probably lost some when I stepped
on that cactus patch too.*
Jerm laughed real hard and got his
friend to come over so he could ask again.

the elders loved him dearly, they thought
he looked just like his grandfather of the same name
and there were whispers and nods about
him being a hereditary chief, though the
system didn't go like that anymore
still, they hoped he'd grow to lead
It's in the blood
Mary once said to him,
though more to herself
for now he was just a boy

wandering alone
most days
circling the rez as if
deep inside he were tending
to land and people

Willy's Funeral

true story
 brothers and cousins
 serving pallbearers
 best friends
 who in the past
 were sometimes
 enemies
 drank through the service
 laughed and had good times
 telling stories
 with bottles blazing
 and the casket
 in the back of the truck
 they detoured
 to the pub
 unloaded the box onto the bar
 and paid respects
 through the night
 reminiscing about
 the last time Willy rode his horse into town
 the cops trying to figure out
 how to give a horse a ticket
where do we leave the fine?
 A punch line that never fails
 of course
 some of the older women
 thought it was disrespectful
 but a good time was had
 by all

and the body was home by
sun-up
returned to the rez
one last time
the morning after
Willy
the last to park his horse outside the bar
to rest
with ancestors