

Lines of Poverty

It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow *deserve* to be poor. You start believing that you're poor because you're stupid and ugly. And then you start believing that you're stupid and ugly because you're Indian. And because you're Indian you start believing you are destined to be poor. Its an ugly cycle and *there's nothing you can do about it.* 13

“What greater grief than the loss of one’s native land” I read that and thought “well of course, man. We Indians have LOST EVERYTHING. We lost our native land, we lost our languages, we lost our songs and dances. We lost each other. We only know how to lose and be lost. 173

I'm going to die if I don't leave. 52

I laughed and laughed. I couldn't stop laughing. I felt like I might die of laughing. 204

I was carrying the burden of my race, you know? I was going to get a bad back from it. 43

I'm transferring to Reardan tomorrow. 49

I'm leaving the rez. 49

“Rowdy,” I said. “I’m going to Reardan tomorrow.” 50

“Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community.” 132

A few folks, especially grandmothers, thought I was a brave little dude for going to a white school. 79

Poverty doesn't give you strength or teach you lessons about perseverance. No, poverty only teaches you how to be poor. 13

“The only thing you kids are being taught is how to give up. Your friend Rowdy, he’s given up. That’s why he likes to hurt people. He wants them to feel as bad as he does.” 42

A vanishing past. 57

I didn’t have money for gas. 121

“All these kids have given up,” he said. “All your friends. All the bullies. And their mothers and fathers have given up, too. And their grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher hear. We’re all defeated.” 42

Young and Stupid and full of ideas. Just like you. 36

But we reservation Indians don’t get to realize our dreams. We don’t get those chances. Or choices. We’re just poor. That’s all we are. 13

But somehow or another, Indians have forgotten that reservations were meant to be death camps.

TOO FREAKING DRUNK to feel any pain when she BURNED TO DEATH. 205

Of course they were drunk, they’re indians. 205

I guess poor guys don’t get kissed on the lips 127

“We don’t have any money for Oscar.” 10

“You fought off that brain surgery. You fought off those seizures. You fought off all the drunks and drug addicts. You kept your hope. And

now, you have to take your hope and go somewhere where other people have hope.” 43

“Are you poor?”

I couldn’t lie to her anymore

“Yes” I said “I’m poor.” 127

My mother was born an Adams and she was still an Adams when she wrote her name in that book. And she was thirty when she gave birth to me. Yep, so that means I was staring at a geometry book that was at least thirty years older than I was. 31

A family history of diabetes and cancer 57

My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That’s absolutely the saddest thing in the world. 31

That old, old, old, *decrepit* geometry book hit my heart with the force of a nuclear bomb. My hopes and dreams floated up in a mushroom cloud. What do you do when the world has declared nuclear war on you? 31

“If you stay on this rez,” mr. P said, “they’re going to kill you. I’m going to kill you, We’re all going to kill you. You can’t fight us forever.” 43

When the holidays rolled around, we didn’t have any money for presents, so Dad did what he always does when we don’t have enough money. 150

He took what little money we did have and ran away to get drunk. 150

I was hot mad. Volcano mad. Tsunami Mad.

Dad just looked down at me with the saddest look in his eyes. He was crying. He looked so *weak*.

I wanted to hate him for his weakness.

I wanted to hate Dad and Mom for our poverty.

I wanted to blame them for my sick dog and for all the other sickness in the world. 11

At school today, I dressed like a homeless dude. It was a pretty easy costume for me. There is not much difference between by good and bad clothes, so i pretty much look half homeless anyway. 77

And so, laughing and crying, we said good-bye to my grandmother. And when we said goodbye to one grandmother, we said good-bye to all of them.

Each funeral was a funeral for all of us.

We lived and died together. 166

A bullet only costs about two cents, and anybody can afford that. 14

In fact, last week, she was walking back home from a mini powwow at the spokane Tribal Community Center, When she was struck and killed by a drunk driver. 157

“No,” Miss Warren said. “Your sister, she is dead.” 201

After Eugene's funeral, I agreed with her. I could have easily killed myself, killed my mother and father, killed the birds, killed the trees, and killed the oxygen in the air.

More than anything I wanted to kill God.

I was joyless 173

I had to wear one of my dad's old suits. 121

My father went on a legendary drinking binge. 171

You have to love somebody that much to also hate them that much too. 191

I wept because I was the only one who was brave and crazy enough to leave the rez. I was the only one with enough arrogance.

My dad started to cry. Not big tears, just little ones. He breathed deep and tried to stop them. 207

I wept and wept and wept because I knew that I was never going to drink and because I was never going to kill myself and because I was going to have a better life out in the white world.

He kept crying. 207

I reached out, wiped the tears off my father's face, and tasted them. Salty 207

We were poor enough to get free lunch, but I didn't want to be the only indian *and* a sad sack who needed charity. 55

Bone crushing reality. 57

Yep my daddy was an undependable drunk. But he'd never miss any of my organized games, concerts, plays, or picnics. He may not have loved me perfectly, but he loved me as well as he could. 186

Penelope gorges her pain and then throws it away. My dad drinks his pain away. 107

I think she was bored of being the prettiest, smartest, and most popular girl in the world. She wanted to get a little crazy, you know? She wanted to get a little smudged. And I was the smudge. 110

**And roger, being kind of heart and a generous pocket, and little bit racist, drove me home that night
And drove me home plenty of other nights too,
If you let be into your life a bit, they can be pretty damn amazing. 129**

Then I realized that she was being my friend. Being a really good friend, in fact. She was concerned about me. I'd been thinking about her breasts and she'd been thinking about my whole life. I was the shallow one. 127

**I knew that two or three of those Indians might not have eaten breakfast this morning.
No food in the house.
I knew that seven or eight of those Indians lived with drunken mothers and fathers.
I knew that one of those Indians had a father who dealt crack and meth.
I knew that two of those Indians had fathers in prison.
I knew that none of them was going to college. Not one of them. 195
And I knew that Rowdy's father was probably going to beat the crap out of him for losing the game. 196**

We were supposed to kill the Indian and save the child. 35

Can your best friend be more important than your family? 24

**There was nothing I could do to save Oscar.
Nothing.
Nothing.
Nothing. 10**

They dreamed about being something other than poor, but they never got the chance to be anything because nobody paid attention to their dreams. 11

We could see our entire world. And our entire world, at that moment, was green and golden and perfect. 226

I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms.

And the tribe of cartoonists.

And the tribe of chronic masturbators.

And the tribe of teenage boys.

And the tribe of small-town kids.

And the tribe of Pacific Northwesterners.

And the tribe of tortilla chips-and-salsa lovers.

And the tribe of poverty.

And the tribe of funeral-goers.

And the tribe of beloved sons.

And the tribe of boys who really missed their best friends. 217

