

Reservation Mathematics

Mixed-up and mixed-blood
I sometimes hate
the white in me
when I see their cruelty
and I sometimes hate
the Indian in me
when I see their weakness

because I understand the cruelty and weakness in me. I belong to both tribes. It's my personal Wounded Knee, my own Little Big Horn. On the telephone, my friend from New York told me I drifted back into a reservation accent only when I talked about pain. How could I tell her

that the reservation is more
than pain?
It's double happiness, too
when I watch the fancydancers
or
the basketball players
or
the comic book collectors
all dreaming

of a life larger than this one, constructed by walls everywhere. It doesn't matter if it's a square, rectangle, or triangle, they all mean the same thing. They're all the direct opposite of a circle. It doesn't matter if it's a triangle, rectangle, or square. They're all the direct opposite of a circle. I've been dreaming of a life

with a new shape, somewhere
in the in-between
between tipi and HUD house
between magic and loss.
I'm always dreaming
of a life between
the $3/16$ that names me white
and the $13/16$
that names me Indian.
That's what has happened to us.
Indians have learned

to love by measuring cup. I can count up all my cousins. I can count every can of commodities in the cupboard. I can count

every piece of broken glass on my reservation and I still wouldn't have enough of anything, neither answers nor love. But I can stand up in front of you and recite formulas; my voice will tremble and my hands will shake. I can stand up, like Lucille said, through your destruction. I can stand up, like Lucille said, through my destruction. I can stand up, like Lucille said, through our destruction, through

every little war, every
little hurricane.
I'll take my Indian thumb
and my white fingers
on my strong right hand
and I'll take my white thumb
and my Indian fingers
on my clumsy left hand
and I'll make fists,
furious.