

DANA SONNENSCHN

*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.