

Almost Ashore, Selected Poems

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Almost Ashore

SELECTED POEMS

GERALD VIZENOR



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Crane Dancers

Almost Ashore

winter sea
over my shoes
shadows
and bright
round stones
at san gregorio

every wave
turns a season
forests adrift
empty shells
memory of fire
so faraway
in the mountains
and canyons

silent pools
raise my faces
by early tide
slight my hand
shoulders
almost ashore

light breaks
over the plovers
certain steps
my traces
blood, bone, stone
turn natural
and heavy waves
rush the sand

Crane Dance

honor me
once as a bear
touch me
by song

cover me
with bright leaves
october traces
by song

heavy snow
weighs the seasons
on my shoulders
by song

set me adrift
on the cold stones
at the shoreline
by song

raise me
in the white pine
and sumac
by song

leave me
near the moccasin
flower and birch
by song

teach me
the great dance
of sandhill cranes
by song

tease me
name the mongrels
sky eyes
by song

set me free
native liberty
twice a bear
by song

sandhill cranes
dragonflies
dance at sunrise
by song

Family Photograph

my father
clement vizenor
was a spruce
among the trees
a native
by totems

corded for pulp
by federal
indian agents
my father
turned away
from white earth
the reservation
colonial genealogies
and moved to the city
with family
at twenty three

native tricksters
teased his memory
shared dreams
and chance
in a mason jar
and ran low
across missions
stumps and stations
late at night
in wild stories

clement abided
the old men
dressed for war
cold and gray

once united
forever cursed
by uniforms

anishinaabe men
deserted twice
by name and praise
break memories
on the nicollet
island bridge
over the dark
mississippi river

arm bands adrift
on the water
wooden limbs
veterans
once civilized
by combat
and crusades
thrown back
forever
to evangelists
and charity

no indian agents
reservation masters
at the cold rails
on the bridge
counting allotments
forty acres short
only family photographs
washed ashore
in the city
that winter

no catechism
catholic catchwords
black lessons
promises of treaty
cash payments
for confirmations
and mercy lines
of racial shame

my father
was anishinaabe
an immigrant
in the city
painted ceilings
pure white
pasted wall paper
fancy flowers
for a union boss
and delivered
the first
white earth
native stories
in the suburbs

treaty women
naturals at the bar
heard my father
measure by promise
my blood at night

native stories
masterly
during the great
depression

inspired survivance
in unheated
cold water rooms
stained by kerosene
city blisters
memories in exile
and the fate
of families
burst overnight

clement vizenor
holds me
in a photograph
that winter
almost a smile
a new spruce

among the bricks
paint cans
half white earth
the other
native immigrant
moved to the city
and lost at cards

White Earth

october sunrise
shimmers in the birch
and cottonwoods

native tricksters
roam in the shadows
rearview mirrors
stories turn
back to stone
faces of shamans
and ravens
on the federal roads

colonial missions
plunder white pine
torture the crane
close cultures
native ceremonies
for the season

government agents
hunker over the ruins
underestimate
the woodland dead
in leather bound
ledger books

benedictory beads
crucifixions
rage over night
twice renounced
in the reeds
meadow larks
old healers

poisoned
by sacraments
on the wing

timber cruisers
muted roses
hues at pine point
count canoes
manners of silence
over wild rice

black lace
purred by children
at saint benedict
catholic schools
archaic ruse
that covets
land and trees
native liberty
general allotments
winter graves
stony survivance
among the bloody
stumps of white pine

cathedrals
of the winter nights
crack the ice
and curse
shaman cures
at the shoreline
centerfolds
tricky stories
medicine bundles

once marooned
by soldiers
await the fire
in great museums

bright moon
breaks on the bridge
stone faces
catch the light
native warriors
slowly cross
the lonesome city

white earth
shadows on a bus
last forever
in late movies
missionaries
stain their bodies
at the altars

native storiers
tease the cruisers
black bears
northern lights
and turn seasons
forever at the source
of lake itasca

jesuit dominion
ghostly crossbones
over birds
beaver and muskrat
trade pelts