

WHEREAS



POEMS LAYLI LONG SOLDIER

Edge

This drive along the road the bend the banks behind the wheel I am called Mommy. My name is Mommy on these drives the sand and brush the end of winter we pass. You in the rearview double buckled back center my love. Your mother's mouth has a roof your mother's mouth is a church. A hut in a field lone standing. The thatched roof has caught spark what flew from walls the spark apart from rock from stable meaning. Large car steady at the curve palest light driest day a field of rocks we are not poor sealed in windows. You hum in the back. I do not know what to say how far to go the winter near dead as we drive you do not understand word for word the word for you is little. But you hear how it feels always. The music plays you swing your feet. And I see it I Mommy the edge but do not point do not say *look* as we pass the heads gold and blowing these dry grasses eaten in fear by man and horses.

38

Here, the sentence will be respected.

I will compose each sentence with care, by minding what the rules of writing dictate.

For example, all sentences will begin with capital letters.

Likewise, the history of the sentence will be honored by ending each one with appropriate punctuation such as a period or question mark, thus bringing the idea to (momentary) completion.

You may like to know, I do not consider this a "creative piece."

I do not regard this as a poem of great imagination or a work of fiction.

Also, historical events will not be dramatized for an "interesting" read.

Therefore, I feel most responsible to the orderly sentence; conveyor of thought.

That said, I will begin.

You may or may not have heard about the Dakota 38.

If this is the first time you've heard of it, you might wonder, "What is the Dakota 38?"

The Dakota 38 refers to thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln.

To date, this is the largest "legal" mass execution in US history.

The hanging took place on December 26, 1862—the day after Christmas.

This was the *same week* that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

In the preceding sentence, I italicize "same week" for emphasis.

There was a movie titled *Lincoln* about the presidency of Abraham Lincoln.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was included in the film *Lincoln*; the hanging of the Dakota 38 was not.

In any case, you might be asking, "Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hung?"

As a side note, the past tense of hang is *hung*, but when referring to the capital punishment of hanging, the correct past tense is *hanged*.

So it's possible that you're asking, "Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hanged?"

They were hanged for the Sioux Uprising.

I want to tell you about the Sioux Uprising, but I don't know where to begin.

I may jump around and details will not unfold in chronological order.

Keep in mind, I am not a historian.

So I will recount facts as best as I can, given limited resources and understanding.

Before Minnesota was a state, the Minnesota region, generally speaking, was the traditional homeland for Dakota, Anishinaabeg, and Ho-Chunk people.

During the 1800s, when the US expanded territory, they "purchased" land from the Dakota people as well as the other tribes.

But another way to understand that sort of "purchase" is: Dakota leaders ceded land to the US government in exchange for money or goods, but most importantly, the safety of their people.

Some say that Dakota leaders did not understand the terms they were entering, or they never would have agreed.

Even others call the entire negotiation "trickery."

But to make whatever-it-was official and binding, the US government drew up an initial treaty.

This treaty was later replaced by another (more convenient) treaty, and then another.

I've had difficulty unraveling the terms of these treaties, given the legal speak and congressional language.

As treaties were abrogated (broken) and new treaties were drafted, one after another, the new treaties often referenced old defunct treaties, and it is a muddy, switchback trail to follow.

Although I often feel lost on this trail, I know I am not alone.

However, as best as I can put the facts together, in 1851, Dakota territory was contained to a twelve-mile by one-hundred-fifty-mile long strip along the Minnesota River.

But just seven years later, in 1858, the northern portion was ceded (taken) and the southern portion was (conveniently) allotted, which reduced Dakota land to a stark ten-mile tract.

These amended and broken treaties are often referred to as the Minnesota Treaties.

The word *Minnesota* comes from *mni*, which means water; and *sota*, which means turbid.

Synonyms for turbid include muddy, unclear, cloudy, confused, and smoky.

Everything is in the language we use.

For example, a treaty is, essentially, a contract between two sovereign nations.

The US treaties with the Dakota Nation were legal contracts that promised money.

It could be said, this money was payment for the land the Dakota ceded; for living within assigned boundaries (a reservation); and for relinquishing rights to their vast hunting territory which, in turn, made Dakota people dependent on other means to survive: money.

The previous sentence is circular, akin to so many aspects of history.

As you may have guessed by now, the money promised in the turbid treaties did not make it into the hands of Dakota people.

In addition, local government traders would not offer credit to "Indians" to purchase food or goods.

Without money, store credit, or rights to hunt beyond their ten-mile tract of land, Dakota people began to starve.

The Dakota people were starving.

The Dakota people starved.

In the preceding sentence, the word "starved" does not need italics for emphasis.

One should read "The Dakota people starved" as a straightforward and plainly stated fact.

As a result—and without other options but to continue to starve—Dakota people retaliated.

Dakota warriors organized, struck out, and killed settlers and traders.

This revolt is called the Sioux Uprising.

Eventually, the US Cavalry came to Mnisota to confront the Uprising.

More than one thousand Dakota people were sent to prison.

As already mentioned, thirty-eight Dakota men were subsequently hanged.

After the hanging, those one thousand Dakota prisoners were released.

However, as further consequence, what remained of Dakota territory in Mnisota was dissolved (stolen).

The Dakota people had no land to return to.

This means they were exiled.

Homeless, the Dakota people of Mnisota were relocated (forced) onto reservations in South Dakota and Nebraska.

Now, every year, a group called the Dakota 38 + 2 Riders conduct a memorial horse ride from Lower Brule, South Dakota, to Mankato, Mnisota.

The Memorial Riders travel 325 miles on horseback for eighteen days, sometimes through sub-zero blizzards.

They conclude their journey on December 26, the day of the hanging.

Memorials help focus our memory on particular people or events.

Often, memorials come in the forms of plaques, statues, or gravestones.

The memorial for the Dakota 38 is not an object inscribed with words, but an *act*.

Yet, I started this piece because I was interested in writing about grasses.

So, there is one other event to include, although it's not in chronological order and we must backtrack a little.

When the Dakota people were starving, as you may remember, government traders would not extend store credit to "Indians."

One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to Dakota people by saying, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass."

There are variations of Myrick's words, but they are all something to that effect.

When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.

When Myrick's body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.

There's irony in their poem.

There was no text.

"Real" poems do not "really" require words.

I have italicized the previous sentence to indicate inner dialogue, a revealing moment.

But, on second thought, the words "Let them eat grass" click the gears of the poem into place.

So, we could also say, language and word choice are crucial to the poem's work.

Things are circling back again.

Sometimes, when in a circle, if I wish to exit, I must leap.

And let the body swing.

From the platform.

Out

to the grasses.

PART II
WHEREAS

Introduction

On Saturday, December 19, 2009, US President Barack Obama signed the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans. No tribal leaders or official representatives were invited to witness and receive the Apology on behalf of tribal nations. President Obama never read the Apology aloud, publicly—although, for the record, Senator Sam Brownback five months later read the Apology to a gathering of five tribal leaders, though there are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the US. The Apology was then folded into a larger, unrelated piece of legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act.

My response is directed to the Apology's delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document. I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation—and in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live.

(1) Whereas Statements

WHEREAS when offered an apology I watch each movement the shoulders
high or folding, tilt of the head both eyes down or straight through
me, I listen for cracks in knuckles or in the word choice, what is it
that I want? *To feel* and mind you I feel from the senses—I read
each muscle, I ask the strength of the gesture to move like a poem.
Expectation's a terse arm-fold, a failing noun-thing
I scold myself in the mirror for holding.

Because I learn from young poets. One sends me new work spotted
with salt crystals she metaphors as her tears. I feel her phrases,
"I say," and "Understand me," and "I wonder."

Pages are cavernous places, white at entrance, black in absorption.
Echo.

If I'm transformed by language, I am often
crouched in footnote or blazing in title.
Where in the body do I begin;

WHEREAS a friend senses what she calls cultural emptiness in a poet's work and after a reading she feels bad for feeling bad for the poet she admits. I want to respond the same could be said for me, some sticky current of Indian emptiness, I feel it not just in my poems but when I'm on drives, in conversations, or as I lie down to sleep but since this dialogue is about writing I want to be correct with my languageness. In a note following the entry for *Indian* an Oxford dictionary warns: *Do not use Indian or Red Indian to talk about American native peoples, as these terms are now outdated; use American Indian instead.* So I explain perhaps the same could be said for my work some burden of American Indian emptiness in my poems how American Indian emptiness surfaces not just on the page but often on drives, in conversations, or when I lie down to sleep. But the term American Indian parts our conversation like a hollow bloated boat that is not ours that neither my friend nor I want to board, knowing it will never take us anywhere but to rot. If the language of race is ever truly attached to emptiness whatever it is I feel now has me in the hull, head knees feet curled, I dare say, to fetal position—but better stated as the form I resort to inside the jaws of a reference;

WHEREAS at four years old I read the first chapter of the Bible aloud I was not Christian
Whereas my hair unbraided ran the length of my spine I sometimes sat on it
Whereas at the table my legs dangled I could not balance peas on my fork
Whereas I used my fingers carefully I pushed the bright green onto silver tines
Whereas you eat like a pig the lady said setting my plate on the floor
Whereas she instructed me to finish on my hands and knees she took another bite
Whereas I watched folds of pale curtains inhale and exhale a summer dance
Whereas in the breath of the afternoon room each tick of the clock
Whereas I rose and placed my eyes and tongue on a shelf above the table first
Whereas I kneeled to my plate I kneeled to the greatest questions
Whereas that moment I knew who I was whereas the moment before I swallowed;

WHEREAS I did not desire in childhood to be a part of this but desired most of all to be a part. A piece combined with others to make up a whole. Some but not all of something. In Lakota it's han'ké, a piece or part of anything. Like the creek trickling behind my aunt's house where Uncle built her a bridge to cross from bank to bank, not far from a grassy clearing with three tipis, a place to gather. She holds three-day workshops on traditional arts, young people from Kyle and Potato Creek arrive one by one eager to *participate*. They have the option my auntie says to sleep at home and return in the morning but by and large they'll stay and camp even during South Dakota winters. The comfort of being together. I think of Plains winds snow drifts ice and limbs the exposure and when I slide my arms into a wool coat and put my hand to the door knob, ready to brave the sub-zero dark, someone says be careful out there always consider the snow your friend. Think badly of it, snow will burn you. I walk out remembering that for millennia we have called ourselves Lakota meaning friend or ally. This relationship to the other. Some but not all, still our piece to everything;

WHEREAS I heard a noise I thought was a sneeze. At the breakfast table pushing eggs around my plate I wondered if he liked my cooking, thought about what to talk about. He pinched his fingers to the bridge of his nose, squeezed his eyes. He wiped. I often say he was a terrible drinker when I was a child I'm not afraid to say it because he's different now: sober, attentive, showered, eating. But in my childhood when things were different I rolled onto my side, my hands together as if to pray, locked between knees. When things were different I lay there for long hours, my face to the wall, blank. My eyes left me, my soldiers, my two scouts to the unseen. And because language is the immaterial I never could speak about the missing so perhaps I cried for the invisible, what I could not see, doubly. What is it to wish for the absence of nothing? There at the breakfast table as an adult, wondering what to talk about if he liked my cooking, pushing the invisible to the plate's edge I looked up to see he hadn't sneezed, he was crying. I'd never heard him cry, didn't recognize the symptoms. I turned to him when I heard him say *I'm sorry I wasn't there sorry for many things* / like that / curative voicing / an opened bundle / or medicine / or birthday wishing / my hand to his shoulder / *it's okay* I said *it's over now* I meant it / because of our faces blankly / because of a lifelong stare down / because of centuries in sorry;

WHEREAS my eyes land on the shoreline of "the arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the history of Native Peoples." Because in others, I hate the act

of laughing when hurt injured or in cases of danger. That bitter hiding. My daughter picks up new habits from friends. She'd been running, tripped, slid on knees and palms onto asphalt.

They carried her into the kitchen, *she just fell, she's bleeding!* Deep red streams down her arms and legs, trails on white tile. I looked at her face. A smile

quivered her. A laugh, a nervous. Doing as her friends do, she braved new behavior, feigned a grin—I couldn't name it but I could spot it. *Stop, my girl. If you're hurting, cry.*

Like that. She let it out, a flood from living room to bathroom. Then a soft water pour I washed carefully light touch clean cotton to bandage. I faced her I reminded,

In our home in our family we are ourselves, real feelings. Be true. Yet I'm serious when I say I laugh reading the phrase, "opened a new chapter." I can't help my body.

I shake. The realization that it took this phrase to show. My daughter's quiver isn't new—but a deep practice very old she's watching me;

WHEREAS a new chapter in history opened with *the thunderbird* when he phoned after dinner to say he was on his way, to meet him in the morning at the Thunderbird Inn. I knew that place on the main drag many times I'd passed the peeling adobe walls its blue trimmed windows with sleeping cars in front of each door. I took the day off work and didn't make excuses whereas I worked long weeks I'd busied myself waiting for that moment anyway. On time I pulled my wheels up close swung my legs from out the car door paced my steps as if this were a normal thing. I knocked that moment I did not waste. He opened the motel door a thick figure at the threshold he stood wearing sunglasses. But in that moment I didn't waste I didn't need to see his eyes or smile lines so much as I needed his presence so I didn't hesitate to invite him to get his things to come to my house and out from a dark room my father entered.

And whereas my father's friend a Hopi painter who served in the military listened to his grandparents after his discharge they said *Start a new chapter in life don't waste a minute!* So he packed his Hopi things his Hopi youth and arms and legs that is whatever he could of his Hopiness into a car and down the highway to the city to art school it was a good time then in Native arts the 1960s. After one holiday break the bus dropped him off alone on Cerrillos Road across from that iconic spot the Thunderbird Inn just a short walk to campus the long strides he took to pursue an endeavor he says as if it were a normal thing to be an artist.

And whereas one of my students asks a visiting poet about education vaguely getting at *what is worth pursuing?* The poet suggests looking at whatever is/was missing in one's life and begin there. So many nods in the room around that table they acknowledge it too. In the missing: power.

And whereas I enrolled in the art school where my father and his Hopi friend first met a place where the college logo is a thunderbird. Whereas looking up the word *thunderbird* I find descriptors such as supernatural which I take to mean not a normal thing. Further I find the thunderbird under a chapter heading *Native American Myths and Legends*. Whereas I once attended a summer writing program and while there a lecture by a poet on Native American myths. As a student I wanted to stand up at the mic during Q and A to challenge

the terms under which one applies the term *myth* not to mention *legend* but I did not because the line was long because the speaker was well-known well-respected in other words he was a legend but not a myth. I could not work myself out from under that power nor what was missing and in hesitation / the language / my supernatural chapter ended;

WHEREAS she wrote a poem about him, he is a relative of mine. She's a lauded poet, she shakes my hand. When they were young, she says, he had an episode at the Indian school. Really? I want to ask for the story. But I don't and admire how tension chisels detail into memory. I remember her hand at the plastic zipper of her vest, the sculpture of her knuckles a bone in her wrist. How much should she tell me, how much to withhold? I watch her ask her higher self. *He broke down in a way that the rest of us wanted to*, she offers. I have not finished the poem she says. Now that we've met maybe I will. I'll send you a copy if I do. Though it has not been sent, though I'll never ask for it, I imagine the episode—him, breaking down like the rest of us want to—what this looks like on the page in poem;

WHEREAS I query my uneasiness with the statement, "Native Peoples are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among those are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." I shift in my seat a needle in my back. Though "unalienable," they're rights I cannot legally claim if placed within a Whereas Statement. Meaning whatever comes after the word "Whereas" and before the semicolon in a Congressional document falls short of legal grounds, is never cause to sue the Government, the Government's courts say. Whereas I remember that abstractions such as "life," "liberty," and "happiness" rarely serve a poem, so I have learned it best not to engage these terms anyway. Yet I smash head-on into this specific differentiation: *the* Creator vs. *their* Creator. Whereas this alters my concern entirely—how do I language a collision arrived at through separation?

When in doubt I'm told, write what I know. So I peel my eye to the moment, my love of it. I wake from a dream about running I interpret as the desire to get there. Pulling back my bed sheets, I teeter down the hall to the face of a new clock in the bathroom mirror. I say, *You're old enough now to look at yourself full-on*. Whereas I set aside interrogation to see that

I cannot

syntax or poem the Creator nor differentiate one Creator from another Creator, much less. That is, mine from theirs, theirs from ours, or why a Creator-split. At the mirror, who can;

WHEREAS I shy. Away from the cliché my friend an artist "emotes" at my table. I shy. Away too I worry and second-guess. Cliché's what's lost its original effect and power through over-use over-reliance I wash the dishes. I smell the citrus scented. In ordinary tasks I can't help the thoughts that lead me elsewhere. We chat while I rinse our cups then I bubble my hands into a pigeonhole. I remember the summer I armed myself with yellow rubber gloves and a bucket of bleach to scrub an abandoned pigeon nest on our porch. My eyes stung raw my fear of mites crawling in molten feathers layers of droppings hardened cakes of white. Whereas a pigeonhole is aka a white hole the dictionary says. A white hole's known as the white space between words set too far apart in letterpress printing a term synonymous with pigeonhole we don't want it. Ever to say we suffer the assignment of a stagnant place in the system my friend avoids this as an artist. She convinces me. I definitely don't want it either the stigma of a place I shy. Away from admitting to her what's in my work: this location. Where I must be firmly positioned to receive an apology the spot from which to answer. Standing here I regard an index finger popping up pointing out a reminder:

Whereas in the infancy of the United States, the founders of the Republic expressed their desire for a just relationship with the Indian tribes, as evidenced by the Northwest Ordinance enacted by Congress in 1787, which begins with the phrase, "The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians";

Because when unconvinced	from this pigeonhole and no other	I can
bleach and scrub	forehead sweat	rubber arms
mental force	art and shape	muscle my back
to loosen the hold	<i>yes I can</i>	shake my head wag
at that good faith	white cake	in a white hole
that stained	refusal to come	clean.

WHEREAS a string-bean blue-eyed man leans back into a swig of beer work-weary lips at the dark bottle keeping cool in short sleeves and khakis he enters the discussion;

Whereas his wrist loose at the bottleneck he comes across as candid "Well, *at least* there was an Apology, that's all I can say" he offers to the circle each of them scholarly;

Whereas under starlight the fireflies wink across east coast grass I sit there painful in my silence glued to a bench in the midst of the American casual;

Whereas a subtle electricity in that low purple light I felt their eyes on my face gauging a reaction and someone's discomfort leaks out in a well-stated "Hmmm";

Whereas like a bird darting from an oncoming semi my mind races to the Apology's assertion: "While the establishment of permanent European settlements in North America did stir conflict with nearby Indian tribes, peaceful and mutually beneficial interactions also took place";

Whereas I cross my arms and raise a curled hand to my mouth as if thinking as if taking it in I allow a static quiet then choose to stand up excusing myself I leave them to unease;

Whereas I drive down the road replaying the get-together how a man and his beer bottle stated their piece and I reel at what I could have said or done better;

Whereas I could've but didn't broach the subject of "genocide" the absence of this term from the Apology and its rephrasing as "conflict" for example;

Whereas since the moment had passed I accept what's done and the knife of my conscience slices with bone-clean self-honesty;

Whereas in a stirred conflict between settlers and an Indian that night in a circle;

Whereas I struggle to confess that I didn't want to explain anything;

Whereas truthfully I wished most to kick the legs of that man's chair out from under him;

Whereas to watch him fall backward legs flailing beer stench across his chest;

Whereas I pictured it happening in cinematic slow-motion delightful;

Whereas the curled hand I raised to my mouth was a sign of indecision;

Whereas I could've done it but I didn't;

Whereas I can admit this also took place, yes, *at least*;

WHEREAS I tire. Of my effort to match the effort of the statement: "Whereas Native Peoples and non-Native settlers engaged in numerous armed conflicts in which unfortunately, both took innocent lives, including those of women and children." I tire

of engaging in numerous conflicts, tire of the word *both*. Both as a woman and a child of that Whereas. Both of words and wordplay, hunching over dictionaries. Tire of understanding weary, weakened, exhausted, reduced in strength from labor. Bored. In a Lakota dictionary, tired is *watúkħa* the dictionary claims. Under this entry, I find the term *watúkħayA* meaning to exhaust somebody or something, for example to tire a horse by not knowing how properly to handle it. Am I *watúkħa* or do I *watúkħayA*? I call my dad to ask

and double-check my findings. How do I say "tired," he responds, "bluġo." If you want to say "really tired," it's "lila bluġo." This is my family's way—the Oglala way—to say tired, and who knows better what tired is than *the people*. How much must I labor

to signify what's real. *Really*, I am five feet ten inches. Really, I sleep on the right side of the bed. Really, I wake after eight hours and my eyes hang as slate gray squares. Really, I am bluġo. Really, I climb the backs of languages, ride them into exhaustion—maybe I pull the reins when I mean go. Maybe kick their sides when I want down. Does it matter. I'm lila bluġo. Stuck, I want off. Let loose from the impulse to note: *Beware, a horse isn't a reference to my heritage;*

WHEREAS her birth signaled the responsibility as mother to teach what it is to be Lakota, therein the question: what did I know about being Lakota? Signaled panic, blood rush my embarrassment. What did I know of our language but pieces? Would I teach her to be pieces. Until a friend comforted, *don't worry, you and your daughter will learn together*. Today she stood sunlight on her shoulders lean and straight to share a song in Diné, her father's language. To sing she motions simultaneously with her hands I watch her *be* in multiple musics. At a ceremony

to honor the Diné Nation's first poet laureate, a speaker explains that each People has been given their own language to reach with. I understand reaching as active, a motion. He offers a prayer and introduction in heritage language. I listen as I reach my eyes into my hands, my hands onto my lap, my lap as the quiet page I hold my daughter in. I rock her back, forward, to the rise of other conversations

about mother tongues versus foster languages, belonging. I connect the dots. I rock in time with references to a philosopher, a master language-thinker who thought of his mother too. Mother-to-child and child-to-mother relationships. But as this philosopher's mother suffered the ill-effects of a stroke he wrote, *I asked her if she was in pain (yes) then where? [. . . she] replies to my question: I have a pain in my mother, as though she were speaking for me, both in my direction and in my place*. His mother, who spoke in his place for his pain and as herself for her own, did this as one-and-the-same. Yet he would propose understanding the word *mother* by what mother is not, the *différance*. Forward, back. I lift my feet

my toes touch ground as I'm reminded of the linguistic impossibility of identity, as if any of us can be identical ever. To whom, to what? Perhaps to Not. I hold my daughter in comfort saying *iyotanchilah michuwintku*. True, I'm never sure how to write our language on the page correctly, the written takes many forms

yet I know she understands through our motion. Rocking, in this country of so many languages where national surveys assert that Native languages are dying. Child-speakers and elder-teachers dwindle, this is public information. But her father and I don't teach in statistics, in this dying I mean. Whereas speaking, itself, is *defiance*—the closest I can come to *différance*. Whereas I confess

these are numbered hours spent responding to a national apology which concerns us, my family. These hours alone to think, without. My hope: my daughter understands wholeness for what it is, not for what it's not, all of it the pieces;

WHEREAS we ride to the airport in a van they swivel their necks and shoulders around to speak to me sugar and lilt in their voices something like nurses their nursely kindness through my hair then engage me as comrades in a fight together. Well what we want to know one lady asks is why they don't have schools *there*? Her outrage empathy her furrowed brow. There are schools *there* I reply. Grade schools high schools colleges. But why aren't there any stores *there*? There are stores *there*. Grocery stores convenience stores trading posts whatever what-have-you I explain but it's here I recognize the break. It's here we roll along the pavement into hills of conversation we share a ride we share a country but live in alternate nations and here I must tell them what they don't know or, should I? *Should I* is the moment to seize and before I know it I say Well you know Native people as in tribes as in people living over *there* are people with their own nations each with its own government and flag they rise to their own national songs and sing in their own languages, even. And by *there* I mean *here* all around us I remind them. Drifting in side-glances to whirring trees through the van windows then back to me they dig in they unearth the golden question My God how come we were never taught this in our schools? The concern and furrow. But God the slowing wheels and we lurch forward in the van's downshift and brake. Together we reach a full stop. Trapped in a helix of traffic we're late for check-in security flights our shoulders flex forward into panicked outward gazes nerves and fingers cradle our wristwatches so to answer their question now would be untimely because to really speak to it ever is, untimely. But *there* Comrades *there there* Nurses. I will remember the swing of your gold earrings. *There* your perfume around me as a fresh blanket. *There* you checked my pulse kindly. *There* the boundary of bedside manners;

WHEREAS a woman I know says she watched a news program a reporter detailed the fire a house in which five children burned perhaps their father too she doesn't recall exactly but remembers the camera on the mother's face the mother's blubbing her hiccupping and wail she leans to me she says she never knew then in those times that year this country the northern state she grew up in she was so young you see she'd never seen it before nobody talked about them she means Indians she tells me and so on and so on but that moment in front of the TV she says was like opening a box left at her door opening to see the thing inside whereas to say she learned through that mother's face can you believe it and I let her finish wanting someone to say it but she hated saying it or so she said admitting how she never knew until then they could feel;

WHEREAS the word *whereas* means it being the case that, or considering that, or while on the contrary; is a qualifying or introductory statement, a conjunction, a connector. Whereas sets the table. The cloth. The saltshakers and plates. Whereas calls me to the table. Whereas precedes and invites. I have come now. I'm seated across from a Whereas smile. Under pressure of formalities, I fidget I shake my legs. I'm not one for these smiles, Whereas I have spent my life in unholding. *What do you mean by unholding?* Whereas asks and since Whereas rarely asks, I am moved to respond, Whereas, I have learned to exist and exist without your formality, saltshakers, plates, cloth. Without the slightest conjunctions to connect me. Without an exchange of questions, without the courtesy of answers. It is mine, this unholding, so that with or without the setup, I can see the dish being served. Whereas let us bow our heads in prayer now, just enough to eat;

WHEREAS I sipped winter water cold-steeped in pine needles, I could taste it for days afterward, I taste it now. When I woke alone gray curtains burned in sunrise and down my throat to the pit, a tincture of those green needles changed me. When should I recount detail, when's it too much? My mother burrows herself for days at a time, so I listen to her. We speak about an envelope for receipts, dark roast coffee and the neighbor's staple gun I want to borrow. In the smallest things I watch the compass needle of conversation register her back to center. What has become of us, mother to her former self. Daughter to mother, present selves. Citizen to country, former and past to present or, is it a matter of *presence*? My daughter wouldn't do it when she was younger but this year she wanted to. For her birthday, an ear piercing. The needle gun hurts only for a moment, we assure her. In the old days Grandma held ice on my earlobes then punctured with a sewing needle. You'll have it easier, I affirm. She rushes through the mall to the needle chair, her smile. Eagerness, the emotion-mark of presence. I want to write something kind, as things of country and nation and nation-to-nation burn, have tattooed me. Red-enflamed-needle-marked me. Yet in the possibility of ink through a needle, the greater picture arrives through a thousand blood dots. Long ago bones were fashioned into needles. If I had my choosing I'd use this tool here, a bone needle to break the skin. To ink-inject the permanent reminder: *I'm here I'm not / numb to a single dot;*

WHEREAS my arm locked to aim on the ground I lay stretched flat deep in a game of marbles inside a canvas pouch my garden of boulders cat eyes aggies peewees I played at recess as a fifth grader as a child I played in their shadows those bodies in cuffed jeans and sneakers three boys moved in stood over me heavy breathing I squinted upward my heart whirred loud as a card in the spokes of a wheel the big-boned blondie let out a piercing "warcry" three boys together whooped and played Indian circled and stomped hands fanning their mouths I lowered my aim rose to my knees gathered my marbles within a jeering circle pink faces sweat laughter the valley sun pounded my back my scalp my dark burning hair I toted my pouch across the playground walked alone as if climbing a descending escalator useless steps to safety I entered the classroom flip top desks with metal bellies glancing outward to classmates rows of post-recess chatter fluorescent lighting side glances no one spoke not one syllable to me I steadied my empty body at the desk stowed my marbles inside a metal belly never again to lie in the dirt on my stomach never again to call this a game in America;

And whereas in my bed in a doorway of dreaming I stood holding a stack of folded blue wool black metal eyelets brass buttons a wooden spool blue thread a pack of sewing needles as if a servant pliant and waiting my forearms upturned I held the makings there I felt a summons I turn to a black-and-white photo you're seated with a canumpa and cloth across your lap I trace a horizontal scar across the bridge of your nose in your eyes mottled irises a torn surface your life on your face this mirror of our family I note a plume in your top hat down both shoulders your hair wrapped in fur strong veins pump through wrists to a soldier's hands a choker above the top button of your wool coat I know how you got that coat I search for a place even marginal to share the story this thread in the seams of our family but what's on a page every stitch is up for ripping my dream never leaves me the laid blue wool shining buttons slim silver needles I recognize the elegance of materials just as they are untouched at the threshold of a room though I cannot see outward nor for whom I hold the materials I am ready;

WHEREAS *re-*
solution's an act
of analyzing and re-
structuring complex
ideas into simpler
ones so I place
a black bracket
on either side of
an [idea] I cordon it
to safety away
from national re-
solution the threat
of re-
ductive
[thinking]:

Whereas Native Peoples are [] people with a deep and
abiding [] in the [], and for millennia Native Peoples
have maintained a powerful [] connection to this land,
as evidenced by their [] and legends;

•

Whereas the Federal Government condemned the [],
[], and [] of Native Peoples and endeavored to as-
similate them by such policies as the redistribution of land under
the Act of February 8, 1887 (25 U.S.C. 331; 24 Stat. 388, chap-
ter 119) (commonly known as the "General Allotment Act"), and
the forcible removal of Native [] from their []
to faraway boarding schools where their Native [] and
[] were degraded and forbidden;

WHEREAS I read an article in the *New York Times* about the federal sequestration of funds from reservation programs, the cuts. In federal promises and treaties. The article details living conditions on reservations a suicide rate ten times higher than the rest of the country. Therein the story of a twelve-year-old girl whose mother died, she doesn't know her father, she bounces home to home to foster home, weary. I regard how plainly the writer imparts her repeated sexual abuse. For mental care, unavailable services. There's a clinic that doesn't have money after May, *don't get sick after May* is the important message. As I read I cry, I always cry, and here I must be clear my crying doesn't indicate sadness. Then I read a comment posted below the on-line article:

I am a fourteen-year-old girl who recently visited the _____ Reservation in South Dakota, with my youth group. The conditions the Native American people were living in were shocking. When I arrived home, I wrote a petition on whitehouse.gov for the US to formally apologize and pay reparations to the Native American people. This petition only stays up until July 23rd, so please sign and share!!! You signing it would really mean a lot to a lot of people. Thank you.

Dear Fourteen-Year-Old Girl, I want to write. The government has already "formally apologized" to Native American people on behalf of the plural *you*, your youth group, your mother and father, your best friends and their families. *You*, as in all American citizens. *You* didn't know that, I know. Yet indeed, Dear Girl, the conditions on reservations have changed since the Apology. Meaning, the Apology has been followed by budget sequestration. In common terms sequestration is removal banishment or exile. In law-speak it means seizure for safe-keeping but changed in federal budgeting to mean subject to cuts, best as I can understand it. Dear Girl, I went to the Indian Health Services to fix a tooth, a complicated pain. Indian health care is guaranteed by treaty but at the clinic limited funds don't allow treatment beyond a filling. The solution offered: *Pull it*. Under pliers masks and clinical lights, a tooth that could've been saved was placed in my palm to hold after sequestration. Dear Girl, I honor your response and action, I do. Yet the root of reparation is repair. My tooth will not grow back. The root, gone.

[belief] [Creator] [spiritual]
[spiritual]
[customs]
[traditions]
[beliefs] [customs]
[children] [families]
[practices]
[languages]

(2) Resolutions

(1)

I recognize

the special legal and
political relationship
Indian tribes have with
the United States and

the solemn

covenant with the land
we share.

(2)

I
commend this land
and this land
honor this land
Native this land
Peoples ☐ this land
for this land
the this land
thousands this land
of this land
years this land
that this land
they this land
have this land
stewarded this land
and this land
protected this land this land this land this land this land this land this
this

(3)

I
recognize
that ¹
official ²
ill- ³
breaking of ⁴
the ⁵
Indian ⁶

1. there have been years of 2. deprivations, 3. conceived policies, and the 4. covenants by
5. Federal Government regarding 6. tribes

(4) I have thought carefully about certain terms in English, the language in which the Apology is written. Likewise, since the Apology is issued to Native people, I have considered Native languages. For months, I dwelled on the word "apologizes." As you may already know, in many Native languages, there is no word for "apologize." The same goes for "sorry." This doesn't mean that in Native communities where the word "apologize" is not spoken, there aren't definite actions for admitting and amending wrongdoing. Thus, I wonder how, without the word, this text translates as a gesture—

The United States, acting
through Congress—

██████ on behalf of the
people of the United States to
all Native Peoples for the
many instances of violence,
maltreatment, and neglect
inflicted on Native Peoples
by citizens of the United
States;

(5) *I express commitment to reveal in a text the shape of its pounding—*

expresses its
regret
for the
ramification
of former wrongs and its commitment to build on the
positive relationships of the past and present to move toward
a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled
as brothers and sisters and harmoniously steward and
protect
the
island together

(6) *I too urge the President to acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land although healing this land is not dependent never has been upon this President meaning tribal nations and the people themselves are healing this land its waters with or without Presidential acknowledgment they act upon this right without apology—*

To speak to law enforcement
these Direct Action Principles
be really clear always ask
have been painstakingly drafted
who what when where why
at behest of the local leadership
e.g. Officer, my name is _____
from Standing Rock
please explain
and are the guidelines
the probable cause for stopping me
for the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ camp
you may ask
I acknowledge a plurality of ways
does that seem reasonable to you
to resist oppression
don't give any further info

People ask why do you bring up
we are Protectors
so many other issues it's because
we are peaceful & prayerful
these issues have been ongoing
"isms" have no place
for 200 years they're interdependent
here we all stand together
we teach the distinction
we are non-violent
btwn civil rights & civil liberties
we are proud to stand
btwn what's legal & what isn't legal
no masks
the camp is 100% volunteer
respect locals
it's a choice to be a Protector
no weapons
liberty is freedom
or what could be construed as weapons
of speech it's a right
property damage does not get us closer
to privacy a fair trial

to our goal

you're free

all campers must get an orientation

from unreasonable search

Direct Action Training

free from seizure of person or home

is required

& civil disobedience: the camp is

for everyone taking action

an act of civil disobedience

no children

now the law protects the corporation

in potentially dangerous situations

so the camp is illegal

we keep each accountable

you must have a buddy system

to these principles

someone must know when you're leaving

this is a ceremony

& when you're coming back

act accordingly

(7) I commend the inventive crafting of a national resolution so mindful of—

boundaries

their boundaries

in their boundaries

located in their boundaries

tribes located in their boundaries

Indian tribes located in their boundaries

recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries

with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries

efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries

reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their

begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in

have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located

that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes

governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian

State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized

the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with

commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts

boundaries

their boundaries

in their boundaries

located in their boundaries

tribes located in their boundaries

Indian tribes located in their boundaries

recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries

with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries

(3) Disclaimer

Nothing in this book—

- (1) authorizes or supports any claim against Layli Long Soldier by the United States; or
- (2) serves as a settlement of any claim against Layli Long Soldier by the United States,
here in the grassesgrassesgrasses.