

Battlefield

By Mark Turcotte

Back when I used to be Indian
I am standing outside the
pool hall with my sister.
She strawberry blonde. Stale sweat
and beer through the
open door. A warrior leans on his stick,
fingers blue with chalk.
Another bends to shoot.
His braids brush the green
felt, swinging to the beat
of the jukebox. We move away.
Hank Williams falls again
in the backseat of a Cadillac.
I look back.
A wind off the distant hills lifts my shirt,
brings the scent
of wounded horses.

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Mark Turcotte was raised on North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. After attending school in Lansing, Michigan, he lived on the road for nearly 15 years. Turcotte moved to Chicago in 1993, where his literary career was given a boost by Illinois Poet Laureate, Gwendolyn Brooks, who awarded him the first Gwendolyn Brooks Open-mic Poetry Award and named him a Significant Illinois Poet. Much of Turcotte's work deals with his personal experience straddling the line between the cultures of natives and whites. He reveals the harsh truths of prejudice and emphasizes the importance of knowing one's cultural heritage.

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