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Buying Jewelry at the Reservation

by Betsy Martin

The artists sit impassive
under the gold disk of the sun
while their wares glitter on tables.
I wish we were in the heart
of the reservation, not here
in the parking lot of a gas station.
They watch me with narrowed eyes
as I walk stiffly from array to array.
I imagine them in city clothes
crossing the street in Manhattan,
hailing a cab, handsome,
black hair flowing.

Her face brightens as I pick up a necklace.
Abalone. These beads are her best-seller,
she says, and her name's Linda Bird.
She hands me her card.
We talk turquoise,
how the finest is from the Sleeping Beauty
mine. I think, as I buy the necklace,
how much money
she could make
if she had a website.

Next year, different souls sit
watching with narrowed eyes.
In the amber heat, all is still,
save the coming and going
of pickup trucks raising and settling the dust.

One man smiles as I pass,
holds up his blue-green loop of gems.
The work is exquisite.
We discuss shades of stone.
Mountains circle the very old land
in purple crenelations.

