VISITING THE MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM WITH SHANAE
by Franklin K.R. Cline

The butterflies just land on your hand there,
if you place your fingers just so on a leaf
in front of them. Who’m I to judge
a butterfly’s happiness? The powwow
exhibition is stuck, it doesn’t rotate
like it should, but there is an American flag and a cooler
and a bored kid looking scrawny in an ill-fitting T-shirt and an old
laptop, so I guess they got some things right.

They got some things right:
we are still alive, they point out
on occasion, but generally we don’t look like how we look
in a museum. That’s what a new famous book
by a newly famous Indian author
talks about at the beginning, or at least
that’s what I heard on NPR. Shanae crinkles
her nose when I mention I’m reading the book and we talk

at the bar about toxic masculinity
and she’s right,
as most always. I don’t read
much of the placards, just gallop through
the stuffy halls that portend to hold us,
whatever small history. Shanae pauses to read most
everything. We come away
talking about how unlike the real
the depictions were, how we felt like
we were walking through a big National Geographic magazine,
the pain of ossification, and on the first floor

before we got up to the second floor Indian exhibit
we stared at two dinosaurs, one devouring the other’s
innards, and I made some joke about colonialism and looked
over at Shanae to see if she laughed—I love her laugh—
and caught her nodding, her eyes fixated
somewhere back before.