

Memengwaawid, To Be A Butterfly:
An Indigenous Exploration of
Northwestern Ontario Anishinawbe and Muskego or Ininiw
Sacred Stories and Teachings in a Contemporary Novel

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Abstract

Among their capacities to entertain, to pass down cultural traditions, ceremonies, dances, songs, and to correct undesired behaviours, sacred stories explain how something in nature came to be and how our interactions with those creatures and other life forms around us lead into actions of established ceremonies of respect for the land and ourselves. Thus, from ceremonies and traditions, to codes of conduct and behaviour, to cultural spirituality and beliefs, sacred stories contain the history of Indigenous peoples. With this recorded history in mind, I ask: How are Anishinawbe and Cree sacred story lessons and lessons learned in one's own life journey connected through themes and issues, characters, and Seven Grandfather Teachings morals?

With the intention to provide a method of understanding the Seven Grandfather Teachings, I blend the writing of morals into a personally influenced fictional story. I also draw upon theories of Indigenous ways of knowing to bring an understanding of relationships and connections to animals and land into the dissertation story. Concepts of Elders and roles of storytelling, and the oral tradition with connections to self and life are also discussed. I interweave all of these concepts in my theoretical framework into an Indigenous storytelling methodology through the use of an Indigenous story method. To elaborate, I refer to established Indigenous researchers including Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2009) to describe how Indigenous storytelling informs and is a research methodology. I also discuss how structures and types of sacred story (Ellis, 1995) can create the foundation of an Indigenous story method.

To inform my interpretation of sacred story characters as they appear in the dissertation story, including the characters of Weesquachak and Windigo, I combine the

readings from literature in related fields (Indigenous education, Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous knowledge) as well as personal understandings gained from in-depth analyses of the sacred story characters. The analysis of sacred story characters includes discussion of character traits, any physical description drawn from sacred story, and actions and behaviours that inform the interpretation of the character and how they appear in the dissertation.

This dissertation story is about a 16-year-old girl named Butterfly who, through a series of adventures with selected characters borrowed from sacred story, copes with many different life experiences during a fall semester in high school and learns some of the lessons often found in sacred story and the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

A part of my own learning throughout my life and my time during the process of writing this dissertation is built into the dissertation novel: my growing sense of personal and cultural pride, and my strength as an Ojibwe woman.

Dedication

For my parents Patrick and Ruby: You are the best storytellers I have ever known. You support me always and I can always turn to you both for sharing your knowledge and invaluable advice. Mom, my role model and personal expert in Anishinawbe sacred stories and cultural traditions, words cannot express my gratitude for all you have shown me—you are my Wonder Woman. Dad, your strength is infectious and I have learned from you that when you put your mind to it, try your best, and persevere, anything becomes possible.

For my sisters Rosanna and Lindsay: You are two of the strongest women that I will ever know.

For my husband Michel: You are my best friend, and you accept me wholly for who I am and just as I am. I cannot thank you enough. I love you so very much, my sweets. Here's to our future together.

For my step-children, Brady and Abigail: You reminded me to keep the youngster Ishkode playful and who, when this happened to you both, inspired me to give Ish the lisp when his front baby teeth fell out.

For my Cocom, Daisy: Every time I pick up a bead, I think of you.

For the Elders and Senators who inspire and share their wisdom about their culture.

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To my committee members, Dr. Renee Bedard, Dr. Judith Leggatt, and Dr. Sandra Wolf: Thank you so much for being open to my novel. My deepest and most sincere thanks for your wonderful suggestions that made the world of Butterfly so much more enriched and whole and aligned.

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Part One: Prologue

Introduction

In order to develop and understand the purpose and roles of Anishinawbe¹ sacred stories and oral traditions within education, I feel it is important to speak of: a) the capacity of oral traditions and sacred stories to the self and in life; b) their abilities to teach about Anishinawbe culture by the teachings contained within those stories; and c) their purpose and use within a Seven Grandfather Teachings education which can be applicable in both traditional and mainstream education systems. I will also discuss briefly some main characters appearing in Ojibwe, Cree and Oji-Cree sacred stories, their potential impact within Seven Grandfather Teachings Education and how they figure within the sacred stories themselves.

Situating Myself in the Research

I write from the perspective of an Anishinawbe¹ woman and teacher. As a high school teacher I saw the need for more Anishinawbe programs that teachers could implement within the classroom that help students and teachers learn about various aspects of the culture. I saw the need for the inclusion of a greater number of Anishinawbe texts within the curriculum and curriculum profiles which many, often newer, teachers may use. As a teacher of post secondary students within a teacher education program, I see the need for tools these future teachers could

¹ For Ojibwe people—more specifically those from Whitewater Lake where my family lives and has historic and land-based connections and with Eabametoong First Nation of which I am a member—Anishinawbe is the term which we use to identify ourselves. While there are other First Nations, Aboriginal or other global Indigenous groups, in this paper I speak specifically to my own culture and family connections and use the term Anishinawbe to also reflect this specificity. However, I am aware of the common history between Anishinawbe, other Ojibwe communities, other Aboriginal, and more broadly, the Indigenous peoples that connects us. These commonalities, of not only history but also belief and spiritual systems, are something that we also share. Anishinawbe should not be confused with the term Aboriginal that is used by the Canadian government to define the Indigenous peoples of Canada. The Canadian *Constitution Act* defines “‘aboriginal peoples of Canada’ as the “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada” (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, *Constitution Act*, 1982, s 35).

use successfully and with little difficulty within their own classrooms. I see the need for the education of teachers about the Anishinawbe culture in general, thus helping to quash stereotypes and possibly anxieties about teaching about the Anishinawbe culture. I also write from the perspective of a former high school student for whom very few aspects of my culture were included within my classes. I write from the perspective of an Anishinawbe person who has struggled with identity and sense of self. These perspectives also heavily drive my interest in pursuing an intrinsic inclusion of the Anishinawbe culture within mainstream classrooms—I wish for all Anishinawbe students to feel pride in and acceptance of their culture.

Like Darren Ranco (2006), a member of the Penobscot Nation and an Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Maine, my interests include Indigenous communities. Parallel to Ranco, I situate myself within education as he situates himself in anthropology in order to “advocate an indigenous perspective” and make use of ways to make the study interesting or important to the members of my community (p. 66). As Ranco sought to learn about and talk about his own cultural community, I wish to do the same, in order to help my community. Later, I discuss the impact other Indigenous authors and researchers have on my dissertation story.

The focus of my dissertation is Seven Grandfather Teachings Education and the use of sacred story in a semi-autobiographical/fictional story form. My interest in this topic of sacred story began when I was a child. I grew up listening to and reading Seven Grandfather Teachings imbedded in sacred stories. During a graduate course in the PhD program that focused on Arts-based Educational Research I took it upon myself to reconsider the Seven Grandfather Teachings. In this class, I created an art-piece in which I illustrated seven scenes taken from seven different sacred stories that I felt reflected each of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. In

this creative process, I saw an answer to my question of how to incorporate Anishinawbe cultural meanings into an elementary or secondary classroom and which would interest both teacher and student. In conjunction with this creative process, I also saw the method for a dissertation that would present me with the opportunity to break from traditional dissertations and create a dissertation that was not only more personal than traditional academic discourse, but also creative and culturally appropriate. A benefit of this type of creative dissertation is that the process of thinking about and implementing research methodology and methods to the final product becomes a journey of personal and cultural meaning making. Further, this type of creative dissertation and its process allows me to add to the research community within my field in not only a highly intrinsic way, but also in a way that is culturally and educationally meaningful: the dissertation contains culturally appropriate and culturally reflective teachings and lessons that readers—whether they be Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, students, researchers or teachers—may be able to take away.

My interest in this topic of sacred story also connects with my interest in superheroes and hero characters. These two interests also drove me to explore the character of Chakabesh, a youth with some superhuman qualities that is a figure included in the dissertation. Ray and Stevens (2003) provide a translation and description of Chakabesh (Ja-Ka-Besh): “Poke-in-the-Eye. A legendary demi-god who undertook challenges regardless of the danger involved” (p. 14). Incorporating elements of Chakabesh and other characters, as well as the morals from sacred stories into contemporary tales with story elements drawn from my personal life has become my focus. These elements assisted me in creating a work that is rich in many ways: cultural connections, cultural beliefs, the importance of family, the ethics and behaviours that traditionally guided family and community, the ways in which Medicine Wheel Teachings were

infused in every aspect of life and living, and how the Seven Grandfather Teachings were connected and embedded in everything that we, the Anishinawbe of my family and overall culture, did.

I should note here that I use this spelling of Chakabesh's name because it is the form that I grew up with. However, the spelling of this character's name varies among different communities in Northwestern Ontario. For instance, while Stephen, Wesley and Wesley (1992) spell it the same as I do, Ray and Stevens (2003) spell it Ja-Ka-Baysh. The works by Stephen, Wesley and Wesley (1991) and Ray and Stevens (2003) are among the reliable printed works of the sacred stories contained therein.

During my own adolescence, it became apparent to me that there was a need for First Nations literature and cultural content within the classroom. I saw and recognized the need for my teachers to gain an understanding of my culture; I was not the only Anishinawbe student in the school. Later on in life, when I was a full-time high school teacher and later a supply teacher, I saw a need for such literatures and cultural awareness within the classroom, specifically the English classroom. I saw the need for the Seven Grandfather Teachings of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth, to be more openly discussed. In addition, it is through an understanding of the Seven Grandfather Teachings that character and connected morals can be introduced within the classroom through the use of sacred stories. In Edward Benton-Banai's text *The Mishomis Book* (1988), he expresses the same thought on sharing the Seven Grandfather Teachings to children as a part of instruction. He writes, "We must begin very early with our children in instructing them in these teachings. Children are born with fully-developed senses and are aware of what is happening around them . . . let us learn from the Seven Grandfathers the importance of giving our young children the teachings they will need to guide them in their later

lives” (p. 61). While there are literatures about Seven Grandfather Teachings and literature on sacred stories, I have not found literature that discusses the Seven Grandfather Teachings within sacred stories. As a post-secondary teacher of an Indigenous Education course for pre-service teachers I saw that although direct-knowledge books such as *The Sacred Tree* by Lane et al. (1985) and *The Mishomis Book* by Benton-Banai (1988) were being taught as a part of curriculum in some of their Education courses, there was a need for something more personally relatable that pre-service teachers could use (prior to and during practical teaching) in order to help them better understand elements of the Anishinawbe culture and issues that some elementary and secondary students and Anishinawbe people may be facing. And, more personally, throughout my life, I see the need to gain a better understanding of myself as a descendant of Anishinawbe and Caucasian parents, but identifying as an Anishinawbe woman. I think back on my adolescence, in periods of my life where I, like many Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999), felt ashamed of myself for who I was, angry, frustrated, and embarrassed that I was feeling that way, and sensitive to my own erratic and dark emotions—I have tried to explore some of these personal feelings in my dissertation novel through the protagonist Butterfly. Now, I am so glad that those feelings are no longer there. Metaphorically speaking, it has been a long journey, at times a dark journey, a journey of tripping over roots and rocks and dusting off those biting bits of dirt from my hands as I fell.

I hope that by telling my story through an Anishinawbe story-form I will allow readers to learn from my life lessons too. Anishinawbe stories, especially trickster stories, often teach us lessons by providing experiences so we do not have to make the mistakes and learn the lessons through making the mistakes ourselves; we can learn through the experiences of others (Fagan, 2009). This Indigenous research dissertation provides an analysis of my dissertation novel that is

comprised of selected Anishinawbe Sacred Stories and draws connections to the Seven Grandfather Teachings. I will explore issues surrounding my own identity and culture primarily through the use of personal and creative story. Drawing upon Indigenous authors and theorists, I will also analyze my dissertation novel to examine themes and issues of identity, culture, community, story, and meanings of life.

Research Focus

My research explores Anishinawbe and Muskego or Ininiw sacred story and related cultural teachings and traditional story characters in a contemporary novel form. I bring understandings of Seven Grandfather Teachings, ethics and standards or expectations of behaviour, understanding of relationships with the land, understanding of relationships between animals, sacred story characters, the writing of morals into contemporary stories, and the significance of personal story to that process.

Structure of Dissertation

I have structured this dissertation into three parts. The first part, which you are currently reading, prepares readers for the dissertation novel. It, especially in the next sections also allows me the opportunity to describe the process of preparing to write the dissertation and why I have chosen this particular format. The second part of the dissertation is the novel that is divided into thirteen chapters. Last, the third part provides discussion and analyses of the dissertation novel and the topics outlined in the Research Focus.

Indigenous Storytelling Methodology and Indigenous Story Method

I discuss in this section Indigenous storytelling and story as an Indigenous methodology

and an Indigenous method. Within Indigenous theorizing, Indigenous storytelling and story are closely connected, just as are Indigenous methodology and method. To put this in to context, with the novel portion of my dissertation I use the methodology of Indigenous storytelling and the method of Indigenous story (especially those in textual form) to express a fictional, and partly autobiographical, narrative account of a teenaged girl who interacts with characters from sacred story. While explaining types of story, Thompson Highway (2002) writes,

There are three distinct terms for the concept of narrative. The first term is *achimoowin*, which means 'to tell a story' or 'to tell the truth.' The second is *kithaskiwin*, which means 'to tell a lie,' meaning 'to weave a web of fiction,' as it were. And the third, which lies at a point of exactly halfway between these first two is *achithoogeewin*, which means 'to mythologize.' Meaning that the visionaries of my people, the thinkers who gave birth and shape to the Cree language as we know it today, chose the exact halfway point between the truth and life, non fiction and fiction, to situate mythology. (pp. 21-22)

It is this halfway point in which my dissertation novel sits. In my dissertation novel, I am mythologizing. To explain, I draw upon events from my real life, especially during the teen years similar to the age of the main character Butterfly, incorporating some personal truths in the characters and their actions. There are also numerous fictional elements incorporated, from events and characters. Although Highway speaks of mythology, he speaks of mythology as it pertains to the language and understanding of Cree people from whom he learned his storytelling tradition and honed his Cree storytelling abilities. Autobiographical elements are a part of the driving plots and events in the story and the mythology; what I can refer to as the sacred story characters and sacred story structure, are blended together throughout the dissertation story. As

you will encounter as you read the novel, the sacred story characters are often introduced in dream states of the protagonist Butterfly. In this way there is some distinction between what may be her waking "reality" and what may be dreamstate or "fiction." Like Highway, I draw upon storytelling traditions from my people, the Ojibwe, and focus upon storytelling and story elements knowing from this tradition that: story is often transmitted and carried across landscapes and language, and across culture and communities; story carries truths and tall-tales, cultural traditions and the values important to a community; story permeates all aspects of life. Story, then, if we speak of it that way, is life.

Indigenous Storytelling as Methodology

While pondering the various issues around Anishinawbe (Ojibwe) and Indigenous identity on a wider scale, the approach I am taking in the dissertation is an Indigenous Methodology that focuses on storytelling. In Kovach's (2009) book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, she writes, there is an "interrelationship between story and knowing" (p. 95). In addition, when we think of Indigenous storytelling as methodology, Archibald (2008) explains, "many First Nations storytellers use their personal life experiences as teaching stories in a manner similar to how they use traditional stories. These storytellers help to carry on the oral tradition's obligation of educational reciprocity" (p. 112). My dissertation follows upon this tradition as well by sharing personal life experiences as a way to gain knowledge, as they are included within the novel portion of the dissertation. I chose the format of both fiction and semi-autobiographical pieces so that I am not only able to create a world in which sacred story characters can interact with the protagonist Butterfly, but also where my own experiences can inform Butterfly's world and the events around her. C. Douglas Ellis (1995) and Margaret Kovach (2009) explain the telling of personal story and how various teachings and

understandings can be seen in those stories and used as a way to compare experiences and learn from each other. Just as it is my attempt to teach through the story I tell, and tell the truth as I see it (Kovach, 2009), Kovach also writes that, "if research is about learning, so as to enhance the well-being of the earth's inhabitants, then story is research. It provides insight from observations, experience, interactions, and intuitions that assist in developing a theory about a phenomenon" (p. 102). The dissertation story, through the experiences and interactions between characters, is intended to be helpful for education and teaching contexts. I will mention here again that while writers of personal story have to be careful of the content they write, of putting themselves out there to be judged or scrutinized or analyzed, within an Indigenous storytelling methodology this is a part of the process of both learning and teaching (Archibald, 2008).

In terms of methodology with storytelling, however, Battiste (2008) explains,

[Indigenous peoples'] acquired knowledge embodies a great wealth of science, philosophy, oral literature, art, and applied skills that have helped sustain Indigenous peoples and their land for millennia. From their [E]lders and within their spiritual connections, Indigenous peoples have learned to heal themselves with the medicines of the earth that have been naturally part of their environment. They have observed patterns in nature and learned how to live and flourish within them. This knowledge has been embedded in the collective community's oral and literary traditions; transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their Indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their [E]lders. (p. 497)

The act of storytelling is important to the methodology just as the story itself is to the method. As a methodology, Indigenous storytelling can be complex, woven with many layers of cultural

traditions and themes. In this Indigenous methodology, storytelling itself is an integral part of Indigenous tradition for continuing cultural knowledge not just within a community but also among many communities. As Augustine (2008) writes, "Our system for keeping knowledge alive was to tell as many people and as far away as possible. So a wide audience kept our knowledge alive. Our songs, ceremonies, dances, and stories were repeated over and over by generations of people" (p. 3). I write of analyzing elements of text versions of sacred stories; Augustine also explains that, "there is no standard methodology in collecting and analyzing oral traditions. There are various methods available to researchers but it is important that a researcher is accepted by the community and by the leaders of a community" (p. 5). While I refer to others regarding Indigenous methodology, namely Kovach (2009), what I am also partly doing here is exploring an approach to my own story because I am writing a dissertation novel as a demonstration of Indigenous storytelling as methodology and Indigenous story method (where Indigenous story as method informs Indigenous storytelling as methodology).

In preparation for writing my dissertation novel, I thought back to and re-read all of the sacred stories that I had heard and read, including ones from Carl Ray and James R. Stevens (2003), C. Douglas Ellis (1995), Daphne Odjig (2009a-j), Basil Johnston (1975, 1994, 1995), Angeline Williams et. al. (1991), Stephen, Wesley, and Wesley (1991, 1992); I also thought back to the published stories from authors that I had read, including works from Ruby Slipperjack (1987, 2001, 2005), Lee Maracle (1995), Eden Robinson (2000), Thomas King (1993, 2003, 2004), and Richard van Camp (1996); I also thought back to some of the researchers I had visited in my Master's and PhD courses and also from my research for my Comprehensive Portfolio, including Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Fyre Jean Graveline (1998). I revisited these and other Indigenous writers because I felt that having a good

knowledge of the many types of storytelling was an important step in presenting and understanding Indigenous storytelling as my methodology.

I should also interject here that Ruby Slipperjack is my mother and also known by her married name Ruby Farrell. Her works have always influenced me growing up: from her paintings to her novels. I remember the moment when her first book *Honour the Sun* (1987) was published and she shared the news with my father and my sisters and me. I was seven years old in 1987. My mother, also a painter, had her many creations hung on the walls around the house. I remember the day when she held a book in her hands, hugged my Dad, and then showed it to my sisters and me. The book had one of her paintings on the front cover and I remembered thinking that it was simply the painting on the cover of a book that she was happy about, and I felt happy for her. Then she explained that she had written the book and was now a published author. "You wrote that?" I remember one of my sisters asking. It was not until that moment when she smiled and nodded and said yes, that I really understood that my mother was the author of a published book. I remember feeling immense pride in and happiness for my mother. Throughout my education, her books have always been there: as books to be read for an English class; as books which I would read on my own time; as books that were so often read by students and instructors who would express their praises for her novels to me once they knew who my mother was; and as books which I now reference and speak to as a part of my dissertation.

In preparation for my dissertation, and as something that would inform my methodology, I also took general themes from the sacred stories connected with Seven Grandfather Teachings, and cultural codes of conduct and behaviour. Finding ways to connect to my culture was important, so learning from Indigenous authors was an important step that allowed me to develop my own ways to do this in my dissertation novel: Ruby Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun* (1987),

Silent Words (1992), *Little Voice* (2001), and *Weesquachak* (2005), Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000), Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Boy in the Treehouse/Girl Who Loved Her Horses* (2000), Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* (1993), and Richard Van Camp's *The Lesser Blessed* (1996) are just some of the Canadian Indigenous writers that influenced me and helped to show me some possibilities of how to create character development and how to write about and reflect on my culture in meaningful ways. These details also inform an Indigenous story method. When I began with the concept of writing a novel, I knew that I wanted a protagonist who could reflect some of my own experiences in high school and in life. I wanted her to be able to interact with sacred story characters that I was not only fond of, but that would add to and enrich my dissertation novel.

Cultural ceremonies and traditions, such as pow-wows and the making of bows and arrows, are not the only things contained in the sacred stories. Personal experiences which help to inform cultural behaviour and codes of conduct, the philosophies and teachings of the culture, the importance and meaning of names are also included in sacred story as a method to pass on to listeners the knowledge of the previous generation that is often location specific (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Cook-Lynn, 2008).

In the Indigenous field of education, Benton-Banai (1988) has put together a book describing, primarily through shorter stories, spiritual aspects of the Anishinawbe culture as well as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. In the Anishinawbe culture, the virtues and morals listed as the Seven Grandfather Teachings (which are also similar to teachings in other Indigenous nations) include wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth (Benton-Banai, 1988). The morals and values in the Seven Grandfather Teachings are qualities of character that help to create a balanced and whole person (Lane, et. al., 1985). Also, Lane, Bopp, Bopp, Brown,

and Elders (1985) in *The Sacred Tree*, describe the spirituality accepted among many Aboriginal people and use of that spirituality (based on the Medicine Wheel) to also instill the morals and values in the Seven Grandfather Teachings. In addition, Buswa and Shawana (1994) have compiled a resource book of activities for elementary and secondary classroom teachers related to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel which have embedded within them the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Four Arrows (Don Trent) (2013) has also presented a book *Teaching truly: A curriculum to Indigenize mainstream curriculum* in which he provides Indigenous perspectives on teaching and learning and culturally relevant activities within mainstream subjects that teachers can use within their curriculum.

Learning and acting out morals and values in our daily lives is not something that can be done in a few days of a workshop, or through a one-day lesson in the classroom. Since nurturing these morals and values takes time and effort, it should be something that takes place daily inside and outside the classroom, preferably in unobtrusive and unforced ways. A way to do this is through a Seven Grandfather Teachings education. Indigenous researcher Pamela Toulouse (2008), in the Literacy and Numeracy secretariat of Ontario monograph *What Works? Research into Practice: Integrating Aboriginal Teaching and Values into the Classroom*, writes; "Aboriginal students require a learning environment that honours who they are and where they have come from" (p.1). Part of the learning environment she speaks to includes the Seven Grandfather Teachings as a way to help Aboriginal students feel both included in the school environment and supported in their learning styles (p. 2). Toulouse provides a chart of the Seven Grandfather Teachings in terms of how they are connected to the school and how teachers can incorporate them in their daily routines:

Respect	Having high expectations for the Aboriginal student and honouring their culture, language and world view in our schools
Love	Demonstrating our belief (as educators) that all Aboriginal students can and will succeed through our own commitment to their learning- teaching styles
Bravery	Committing to change our school curriculum through including the contributions, innovations and inventions of Aboriginal people
Wisdom	Sharing effective practices in Aboriginal education through ongoing professional development and research that focuses on imbuing equity
Humility	Acknowledging that we need to learn more about the diversity of Aboriginal people and accessing key First Nation resources to enhance that state
Honesty	Accepting that we have much to learn from one another and reviewing the factors involved to encourage change in the education system (increased parental-guardian involvement, teacher education)
Truth	Developing measurable outcomes for Aboriginal student success and using them as key indicators of how inclusive our curriculum and pedagogy really are

Figure 1: Ojibwe Good Life Teachings and Implications for Education. Pamela Toulouse (2008) What Works? Research into Practice: Integrating Aboriginal Teaching and Values into the Classroom, p. 2.

Here we see how Toulouse connects the Seven Grandfather Teachings to a school setting and how each of the teachings can be viewed within the school and classroom settings. What I focus on, rather than their inclusion within a school or class setting, is how the traditional Seven Grandfather Teachings are embedded within the novel and that readers are welcome to see these Teachings in the same way or in other areas. I posit that this dissertation novel might well support educators in incorporating these teachings into a classroom situation but I will say more about this in the epilogue to the dissertation as it is not the main thrust of the dissertation.

Cree Elder Jerry Saddleback (through Wilson, 2008) has said “there are certain morals, lessons or events that take place, but different storytellers shape them according to their own experience and that of the listener” (pp. 97-98). The morals or values represented in the Seven Grandfather Teachings are a strong connection with the morals or values that Saddleback supports as a feature of storytelling. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) also supports values as a part of methodology in the following:

Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are ‘factors’ to be built in to research explicitly, to research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways. (p. 15)

Within my dissertation novel, I reflect upon these elements contained within sacred story as an informed part of my Indigenous storytelling methodology. Doing this helps to not only enrich my novel, but to add to it the multi-layers of cultural traditions, ceremonies, and some of the many other nuances specific to my culture. Yet, although I write one story, within the realm of sacred story, there is not just one type of sacred story.

Indigenous Story as Method

The story-structure of Cree and Ojibwe stories informs my Indigenous story method greatly. My Indigenous story-based method is focused on firstly understanding the content and structure of story. Using story as method is shared and supported within the Indigenous researcher community. Indigenous scholars Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetineppinesiik Stark, explain in their edited work *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* (2013), that during a conference, they

Observed that many of [their] colleagues were using stories as a kind of methodology or center point. We noticed that stories—in their broadest sense—were being used as theoretical frameworks guiding questions in law, history, anthropology, environmental studies, and other fields . . . when [they] reflected upon the traditional and contemporary practices of [their] home communities and

cultures, and those of [their] relations, it occurred to [them] that stories were operating as different entryways, foundations, beginning points—as centers—to Anishinaabeg Studies. (p. xvi)

There are connections from the above statement and to my own research. I use storytelling where the act of storytelling and that act of sharing stories become my methodology. The method that informs my storytelling methodology is story itself. My Anishinawbe theoretical framework informs my method and includes sacred story characters, the relationships of land, the relationships of animals, Seven Grandfather Teachings, sacred story characters (as they appear within the novel), and ethics and behaviour expectations. While I could expand here about the data sources, I believe it better to allow the reader to experience the novel and then to discuss in detail in Part Three (the Epilogue) the context, characters, and novel story in relation to the methodology. To help the reader experience the novel, in this next section I discuss how the different types of sacred story and traditional narratives and personal experiences inform story as method and discuss how my creation of a story as my dissertation is my method. In this use of story, Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark (2013) are also supportive. They found that

Much scholarship produced by Anishinabeg could be argued as different embodiments of the idea that Anishinaabeg Studies resides in and through Anishinaabeg stories—past, present, and future. As before, Anishinaabeg are examining our community’s offerings, adding perspectives and ideas, and making new stories in the interests of carrying forward an intellectual and collective future . . . Anishinaabeg-centered scholarship emerging from an examination of Anishinabeg stories represents some of the most innovative and exciting work being produced today. (p. xvi)

But, what are the types of story that inform my research and my method? To explain the various types of traditional Indigenous story, with reference to Indigenous storytelling, Wilson (2008), while citing Cree Elder Jerry Saddleback, states that,

There are three styles of levels of [story] . . . At a higher level are sacred stories, which are specific in form, content, context and structure. These stories themselves must be told at different levels according to the initiation level of the listener. Only those trained, tested and given permission to do so are allowed to tell these stories, which must never vary in how they are told. They are sacred and contain the history of our people . . . The second level stories are like the Indigenous legends that you may have heard or read in books. There are certain morals, lessons or events that take place, but different storytellers shape them according to their own experience and that of the listener. The intent or underlying message of these stories remains the same . . . The third style of story is relating personal experiences or the experiences of other people . . . Elders often use experiences from their own or others' lives to help counsel or teach. (pp. 97-98)

This act of relating and telling personal experiences is an important part of my Indigenous method. This telling of personal experiences and personal story (Ellis, 1995) also reflects the Indigenous methodology that focuses on acts of storytelling as a way to impart knowledge and teachings.

In order to be able to speak to the different types of sacred story and to discuss the types of story and narratives that inform and are the basis of my method, I turned primarily to the work

of C. Douglas Ellis. In C. Douglas Ellis' (1995) work *Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay*, he spends a great deal of time in the beginning of the book discussing the different types of Cree sacred and narrative story. Although the focus is on Cree story, C. Douglas Ellis' work is not only able to clearly distinguish between the many types of story, but I feel that he also does so in a way that can translate easily into Ojibwe story and story types. This may happen for the simple reason that many of the stories between these two Nations are similar in content, context, and form. For instance, there are stories shared between both Nations that speak of the young and somewhat supernaturally strong Chakabesh (Ellis, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003).

In his aforementioned work on Cree Legends and Narratives, Ellis (1995) describes high-level sacred story as containing two major divisions: Traditional Discourse (see Figure 2) and Popular Discourse (see Figure 3). Traditional Discourse contains what Wilson refers to as high-level sacred story. Traditional Discourse is described as "often repeated and familiar narrative which may belong to a well-known body or canon of traditional accounts" (Ellis, 1995, p. xix), which Ellis identifies as sacred stories. Traditional Discourse and the sacred stories has a sense of timelessness, where the world as we know it is still developing and is in a "time when things were still in a state of flux in the world: animals and birds talked and strange, unspecified voices gave directions to isolated man" (Ellis, 1995, p. xix). In high-level sacred story, there is a sequential ordering to events where terms such as "now then" and "and finally then" are often used (Ellis, 1995).

TRADITIONAL DISCOURSE		
âtalôhkâna	Non-cyclical	Unitary episode (e.g., arrival of man in the world) Folktale (e.g., animal story)
	Cyclical	‘heroic’ episode (e.g., Chakabesh tale) ‘thematic’ episode (e.g., <i>pâstâmowin</i>)
(tip)acimowina	Historical narrative	
songs		

Figure 2. Traditional Discourse. This figure illustrates the types of story associated with Traditional Discourse as seen in part from C. Douglas Ellis’ (1995) Introduction, p. xxi.

POPULAR DISCOURSE	
(tip)acimowina	Accounts of personal experiences, events, reminiscences
descriptions	Technology, recipes, etc.

Figure 3. Popular Discourse. This figure illustrates the types of story and narratives associated with Popular Discourse as seen in part from C. Douglas Ellis’ (1995) Introduction, p. xxii.

According to Ellis (1995), Traditional Discourse sacred story contains three major types: Âtalôhkâna, (tip)acimowina, and songs. Âtalôhkâna is distinguished contains two groups of sacred story: non-cyclical and cyclical. In Anishinabemowin (Ojibwe language), these sacred stories are called aadizokaang. These aadizookaang are “generally considered ‘traditional’ or ‘sacred’ narratives that embody values, philosophies, and laws important to life” (Doerfler, Sinclair, Stark, 2013, p. xvii). But for purposes of being linear and clear in my discussion of these types of story, for which I draw heavily upon Ellis, I will use his language and terminology. Sugarhead and O’Meara (1996) also provide translation for the different types of sacred story from an Ojibwe perspective. In their work *Ninoontan, I Can Hear It: Ojibwe Stories from Lansdowne House* they explain that tipaatihsoohkaan or aatihsoohkaan (also the Cree âtalôhkâna) refer to the sacred stories that are “understood to refer to true stories about a mythical past” (p. x). These aatihsoohkaan are also characterized by “a time before earth and the humans on it were fully formed, and when creatures which no longer exist were present” (p. x). I

will refer to this type of story as âtalôhkâna since my primary source on these is from Ellis (1995).

Non-cyclical âtalôhkâna sacred story has two subtypes: unitary episodes and thematic episodes. We can see many features within unitary episodes. First of all, they often contain stories about the origin of humans. Next, the setting has a sense of timelessness; the words "once" can often be heard or seen; the background is a "mythical land" with an "unidentified voice"; however, once we are given knowledge of the initial setting it is often not mentioned again. There is also a clear sequence to the events that is the same throughout the different unitary episodes. Lastly, there is a clear and apparent major theme; characterization is minimal and weak; and, the stories are self-contained and can stand on their own (Ellis, xxii-xxv). Creation stories, like Ray and Stevens' (2003) "Weesakajac and the Flood," which describes how the muskrat was the only animal to bring back a grain of sand from the bottom of the waters' depths that Weesquachak used to create Turtle Island and the land as we know it now, are examples of this non-cyclical sacred story.

The second subtype of non-cyclical âtalôhkâna sacred story is the folktale. Folktales, which are still considered sacred story, often describe how something came to be or how something came to be changed: stories of how the muskrat got his tail (Ellis, 1995, pp. 282-283), why rabbits have long ears (Odjig, 2009e), and why the beaver has a flat tail (Fox, 1974) are a few examples. In these, we also often see "once, long ago" in the beginning of the story, where characterization development is not important, and where the ending happens "just so" (Ellis, p. xxv).

Cyclical âtalôhkâna sacred story also has two subtypes: heroic and thematic episodes. Heroic episodes feature a hero such as Chakabesh or even Weesquachak, and these stories have

sequels or episodes where the hero is always the main character or protagonist. According to Ellis, as heroic episodes are told and re-told, it is important that key plot and key events be kept in the same order, where other non-key areas of the story can be embellished by the storyteller. There is a theme or motif, characterization develops throughout the episodes, and there are endings to events (pp. xxx-xxxii).

A second subtype of cyclical âtalôhkâna sacred story includes the thematic episodes. These thematic episodes have many features: they contain a cycle of themes in which morals can be explicitly stated, and where social values and codes of conduct are clearly illustrated; although set in the real world with real world people, the story may contain fanciful elements; the language is of everyday use and is uncomplicated (Ellis, pp. xxxii-xxxii). Also within these cyclical âtalôhkâna sacred story categories are the thematic episodes known as pâstâmowin. Pâstâmowin stories are about tales of blasphemy and requital that teach the idea of what you do comes back to you (Ellis, p. xxxiii). These pâstâmowin are known for a "simple plot", "little or no characterization", and they have a "clear" message (Ellis, p. xxxiii). The pâstâmowin, according to Ellis, are also known as a type of children's literature where everyday language is used in the telling of the story, where morals are explicit and social values are instilled, and where magic can occur in a real world setting (Ellis, p. xxxiii).

Within Traditional Discourse, the second major type of sacred story is (tip)âcimôwina. (Tip)âcimôwina contains historical narratives. These historical narratives contained in the (tip)âcimôwina "record real, or supposedly real, events" (Ellis, p. xxi). Sugarhead and O'Meara (1996) refer to this type of story as tipacimowin or acimowin which include a "wide variety of types, including historical and personal accounts, amusing stories, and others" (p. x). Ellis also describes these as including "action stories" which belong within the Traditional Discourse

because their "frequent repetition" from being shared and told has taken on a "canonical form" (Ellis, p. xxi). (Tip)âcimôwina and historical narrative stories describe and explain how features of landscape were created, how and why landscapes were given names. They contain factual information (Ellis, p. xxxiii), and they have unspecified pasts even if the locations are known (Ellis, p. xxi).

The third, and last, major type of Traditional Discourse sacred story are songs. Although Ellis does not spend much time discussing songs as Traditional Discourse and, as such, a part of sacred story, he does say this: "Hunting songs, such as those used to propitiate the bear-spirit and promote good hunting, or those used in conjuring or for healing purposes are known to exist in other areas. Among the selections in the text, the only example of song is that of the muskrat" (Ellis, p. xxxiv). Ellis presents the brief story "How the muskrat got his long, tapered tail" (p. 283) which describes how much muskrat disliked his tail and tells us why his tail is now long and tapered. Ellis shares with us this translation of the story, "Well then, this muskrat disliked [his tail] very much as he swam around. He went around crying" (p. 283). Ellis also shares the song that muskrat would sing as a lament about his tail:

"I'm dragging it around, My Tail,

My Tail, My Tail;

N'draggin' it around, My Tail,

My Tail"" (Ellis, 283).

Although the song is brief, it describes muskrat's obsession with his tail through simple language and through one clear idea. We can see muskrat's negative obsession towards his tail in the

repeated words of "My Tail", which is also said to be "flat and big like a beaver's" (Ellis, p. 283). In the song, the repetition of the phrases lets us see how muskrat is so focused on how he has to drag his tail around him and shows us his melancholic attitude about it. The story also describes that when muskrat was eventually heard, "his tail was cut off on each side" and that is the reason why his tail looks how it does now (Ellis, p. 283). However, song is not limited to those songs that may appear within sacred story. As Ellis mentioned, we can hear song as a part of hunting and hunting ceremonies. In Absolon and Willett's (2004) article that discusses Aboriginal research through the lens of traditional berry picking and hunting knowledge and skills, these researchers describe that,

Berry picking and hunting required a knowledge set of seeking skills, which sustained Indigenous families and communities for thousands of years. We understood that we are all related and that our actions affect our environment; that the mere observance of a thing changes it. Therefore, we must care for our environment in order to care for ourselves. Indigenous communities are comprised of cultural histories passed down since time immemorial . . . Such histories have been carried on from generation to generation via oral traditions of storytelling, ceremony, songs, and teachings, as well as rituals and sharing. (pp. 7-8)

A part of this care for the environment and the animals within it included ensuring that the proper respect was shown to animals that have given up their life to a hunter. Woodland hunters, and I speak with an Anishinawbe perspective in this point since this is common amongst my family, may often either sing a song or say a prayer to an animal after it has been killed; they may sing a song or prayer at the beginning of a hunt to hope for a successful day; or, in most

cases, hunters would lay down tobacco near or on the killed animal as a sign of respect and thanks. In his text *Ojibwe Heritage* (1994), Basil Johnston shares these teachings,

Many animal beings quit the land for the winter; life changed for the Anishnabeg. From this annual circumstance and from the periodic disappearance of animals began many customs and practices connecting with the taking of game. There were prayers said or thought at the death of an animal being, prayers that expressed sorrow and heed and apology. (p. 57)

Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark (2013) also support this tradition of the offering or gifting of tobacco,

In Anishinaabe tradition, an offering is a gift. It's a gesture of relationship between people, animals, spirits, and other entities in the universe, given the interests of creating ties, honoring them, or asking for assistance and direction. Offerings are acts of responsibility. Making one includes acknowledging value, promising respect, and affirming the presence of another being . . . offerings are the currency of life; they constitute ties that form a network of Creation. They can take many forms, from *asemaa* (tobacco) to *nagamowin* (songs) to *zhooniyaa* (money). Food is an offering. A story can be an offering. Knowledge can be an offering . . . In Anishinaabemowin, the word for an offering is *bagijigan* (plural: *bagijiganan*), and the act of making an offering is *bagijige* . . . it is a gift that hopes to engage, affirm, and inspire relationships with all who read it. (p. xv)

It is important to note that how the hunters expressed this respect and thanks to animals killed through the hunt, whether through song, prayer, silent respects, or laying down of tobacco,

differed between nations and communities. These teachings are reflected within the dissertation novel during a hunting scene and it is discussed further in Part Three, the Epilogue.

The second major type of story that Ellis describes is Popular Discourse. Popular Discourse, which Ellis refers to as (tip)âcimôwina in Cree, varies "widely in type, from lively reports of personal experiences . . . or charming descriptions of childhood memories . . . to reminiscences of long ago[and even] hunting experience[s]" (Ellis, p. xxxv). In Anishinaabemowin, these types of story, these narratives, are referred to as dibaajimowinan. These dibaajimowinan, as Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark (2013) describe, are "generally translated to mean 'histories' and 'news.' They range in time form long ago to today, and often tell of family genealogies, geographies, and historical experiences" (p. xvii). Ellis describes (tip)âcimôwina story type as often "free-running, typical of informal narrative. The narrator tells it about someone he is supposed to have known, although [some of these stories could be] told of more than one person" (Ellis, p. xxxv). Ellis also relates information about the structure of narrative (tip)âcimôwina. (Tip)âcimôwina structure often first describes then gives details about the setting, and it provides two stages of the plot (two major events) within the narrative. Each of the two stages or major events are introduced by indicating phrases such as "and now" or "and so it was" (Ellis, p. xxxv). (Tip)âcimôwina, because of their more information nature of narrative and story, allows tellers of these story more freedom of improvisation and theme development as they tell them (Ellis, 1995).

Within Popular Discourse, we also see three other types: description, oratory/correspondence, and conversation. Ellis, in his text, provides story or narrative examples for each of these types. Description allows for the sharing of descriptions of technology, recipes, preparing traditional medicines and cultural items and these take place in informal settings as a

part of conversation. Oratory or correspondence, as indicated by Ellis (1995), has little examples where Sugarhead and O'Meara's (1996) text has no mention of oratory or correspondence as a category in any type of story. One can surmise that this may be because the Cree and Ojibwe culture was made of an oral communication system, so it is those oral stories that pass on and not accounts that are written down. Yet, Ellis does provide an example of correspondence as it appears within a conversation where an Elder reads from written syllabic text (Ellis, p. xxxvi). The last major type of Popular Discourse is that of conversation which, as described by Ellis, focuses on the "natural speaking style" of a group of people—in this case the Cree people of Moose Cree First Nation (Ellis, p. xxxvi). The Moose Cree or Western Swampy Cree had traditionally referred to themselves as Muskego (or other similar dialect variation), but recent linguistic changes have corrected this more accurately as Ininiw (Ellis, 1995).

As a method within the novel portion of my dissertation, I draw upon Popular Discourse and the second and third type of story that Wilson (2008) and Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark (2013) discuss as well as the Popular Discourse and its major types that Ellis (1995) and Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark (2013) describe. In addition, while I reference the first level of story as sacred story because they contain various cultural teachings and traditions, I have made a conscious choice to not use their story-structure because of their nature and that they are considered high-level sacred stories. High-level or Traditional Discourse sacred stories are to be told only during certain times of year and, sometimes, under certain circumstances. I must always show respect to these, and all, sacred stories. As described by Wilson (2008), there are often creation stories or stories that describe how the earth and animals and plants came to be in this world; Doerfler, Sinclair, and Stark (2013) offer some additional knowledge to this by stating that "the Anishinaabeg Creation Story, which retells of our creation, time on Turtle Island, migration from

the east, and path into the future . . . is made up of a vast collection of stories that embody history, law, and many experiences and perspectives. These live, change, and grow through continuous retellings, constituting a dynamic narrative practice and process by a people” (p. xviii). However, the creation stories are not a part of the focus of my dissertation. Further, because the creation stories explain the creation of our world and everything in it—I dare not, even by accident, retell these high-level sacred stories (especially in a novel that is a mix of fiction, reality, and sacred story elements) as I worry that the result would be highly disrespectful and culturally inappropriate.

Thinking back to Tomson Highway’s ideas on mythology and reality, the half-truth and half-fiction state where my dissertation sits, Doerfler, Sinclair, and Stark (2013) add these thoughts about *aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowin* where they are

Necessary parts of Anishinaabeg narrative tradition. Together they are like maps, or perhaps instructions, that teach us how to navigate the past, present, and future. They tell us about the past, but at the same time inform our present and guide our future. *Aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowin* are ultimately about creation and re-creation. We believe that all of our stories include and encompass senses of *aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowin* and together form a great Anishinaabeg storytelling tradition. (p. xviii)

I see connections to this statement and my dissertation in many ways. Although I do not declare my dissertation story as *aadizookaanag* (sacred story), it may fit within *dibaajimowin* (narratives, histories, historical experiences) in that it is a form of personal experience storytelling—I use my personal experiences within the dissertation story, and Butterfly’s experience, although fictional,

also describes a set of personal experience stories. The story of Butterfly tells us how events in her past inform her present and teach her lessons she can use in the future.

Informing the Method

An Indigenous method of learning and teaching is through storytelling traditions. The sacred stories my mother heard growing up, the same sacred stories from the printed transcriptions that my mother wrote down from recorded audio tapes that my Cocom made for her at her request between 1991-1995, and those that were passed down to my sisters and I are a part of that Anishinawbe story-telling tradition of passing down knowledge—it is an Indigenous method of learning and teaching which I emulate within my dissertation novel. In terms of Indigenous story and oral traditions, Augustine (2008) explains,

Oral traditions receive the voice of authenticity and authority from family members who have experienced life in a certain location or community. However, the main difference is that Indigenous people usually have occupied a certain area of land for hundreds if not thousands of years. The collective knowledge and memory accumulated over the long period of time is reflected in their language and philosophy of life. (p. 4)

Thus the stories passed down to my mother and my grandmother were stories accumulated over a long period of time within a certain location—Whitewater Lake in Ontario. The stories passed down through my family to my Cocom echo many of the works published by Ray and Stevens (2003) and Ellis (1995). Although I write my dissertation for myself, for my own family--my mother, my sisters, my cousins, my Cocom--I also write this especially for others of the Anishinawbe culture, of Indigenous cultures, and for educators and students who I hope may

learn about some of the various aspects of the Anishinawbe culture as presented in my dissertation. The transcripts from the audiotapes recorded by my Cocom inform and give me background knowledge about the sacred stories and family story and history passed down in my family; these stories feature Weesquachak, Shingibish (a helldiver or grebe), why things came to be (i.e. the black marks on the birch tree), creation story, as well as family narratives and history. Because of their sensitive nature, having been recorded by my Cocom who has since passed away, I will not quote from them or directly assess, or analyze them. They are simply used to inform my background knowledge of Ojibwe sacred and narrative story.

Literature Review

Since our sacred stories are shared with community through Elders and traditional teachers, it is out of respect that I begin the literature review with discussion of these important guides in our communities. I then discuss the importance of oral traditions and sacred stories to self and life. I next discuss why morals and values, codes of conduct, and cultural behaviors are evident in other sacred stories. I then discuss the heroic in sacred stories, specifically discussing the character Chakabesh; stories about this character clearly demonstrate the moral lessons in the Seven Grandfather teachings.

Elders and Teachers as Storytellers: Their roles in Education and in Life

Our keepers of cultural knowledge, our Elders, help to define what education means for Anishinawbe people and, more widely, for some other Indigenous people and our perspectives. In her doctoral dissertation on Indigenous identity, Cora Weber-Pillwax (2003) outlines what she feels are the principles of Indigenous Research Methodology. She explains that,

Any theories developed or proposed are based upon and supported by Indigenous forms of epistemology. We as Indigenous scholars who wish to participate in the creation of knowledge within our own ways of being must begin with an active and scholarly recognition of who our philosophers and prophets are in our own communities. These are still the keepers and the teachers of our epistemologies.

(p. 42)

Our history and knowledge, which help define who we are as a cultural group, are often kept within the Elders' cultural knowledge. This cultural knowledge includes our cultural traditions and ceremonies, songs and dances, traditional uses of medicinal plants and herbs, traditional arts and crafts, community protocols and codes of conduct, spirituality and ways of living on earth, and last, but certainly not least, sacred stories (which contain much of the cultural knowledge that has been highlighted). I speak of this cultural knowledge that is passed down and taught in many ways in Anishinawbe culture and reflect this important aspect into the dissertation novel where Butterfly's Cocom (grandmother) imparts her knowledge to Butterfly and other members of the family.

With many educational institutions and individual educators in North America seeing the value of Elders' contributions in the classroom, as educators in their own rights, Elders have begun to play a more significant role within mainstream education (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Absolon & Willett, 2004; Bequette, 2007). Bequette (2007), in his article on traditional arts knowledge and traditional ecological knowledge and how schools can work with local Aboriginal communities for programming, states that, "These include activities that engage local *cultural practitioners*, [local Indigenous] artist/Elders for instance, inviting them to visit schools and explain the workings of contemporary Indigenous cultures. The fact that many Elders are

sought for their knowledge in the creation of curricula materials demonstrates the value of their cultural knowledge” (p. 362). Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), in their article on Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska ways of knowing, also emphasize the role of Elders within a broad spectrum of Indigenous education. Within their article, the role of storytelling is also emphasized, suggesting that Elders have both the ability and responsibility to share and teach a variety of lessons and cultural knowledges. In terms of teaching, Johnston (1994), also speaks of the commitment of Elders to share and teach their knowledge with children. I do not interview Elders as a part of my dissertation process because to do so would have been a very different study that I may undertake in my future career. I discuss their roles here because I feel it is important to acknowledge and show respect toward Elders’ within the Anishinawbe culture. I feel that the review process undergone by my Supervisor and my Committee, with their special set of expertise and knowledge in Aboriginal culture and literature, will help to ensure cultural sensitivity and appropriateness of the incorporation of sacred story characters and elements of Seven Grandfather Teachings within my dissertation. My committee has reviewed all aspects of my research throughout the dissertation process and has provided input, feedback and questions, has supported my incorporation of sacred story elements and the use of the story form as my dissertation.

An Indigenous person of New Mexico, Romero-Little (2006), in her article that provides commentary on broad approaches to Indigenous education and, more specifically, Indigenous language revitalization, provides a list of suggestions as to what aspects of Indigenous cultures could be included within a successful Indigenous literature-based education, such as language renewal and community building. However, even though she states that previous approaches to an Indigenous education often fail to include “Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and

teaching" (p. 401), her own suggested list of approaches does not discuss or mention the invaluable source of Elders' knowledge.

Without the cultural language, cultural nuances and other teachings rooted within sacred stories may be lost in verbal and textual translations (Iseke-Barnes, 2009). Translated and written sacred stories that are told by Elders are still invaluable resources to educators and communities, despite challenges and drawbacks of using translations of the oral sacred stories into English text. Many Ojibwe authors discuss why they decide to write in English rather than Ojibwe. Johnston (1994) writes that,

the heritage of the Ojibway speaking peoples and their Algonkian brothers and sisters will be a little better understood . . . What is difficult in an undertaking of this kind is retaining the substance of the meaning of the stories while changing the metaphors, and figures of speech which must necessarily be done during any translation and interpretation from one language to another. (p. 7)

Johnston (1994) also explains, "readers are asked to bear in mind that like any other language, Ojibway makes liberal and imaginative uses of images, metaphors, and figures of speech to express in the concrete abstract ideas and concepts" (p. 8). In discussing some of the challenges of learning Ojibwe and translating Ojibwe meanings and language into English, Roy and Morgan (2008) write:

Ojibwe can be described as a language of verbs, a see-and-say language in other words. In Anishnaabemowin, for example, words are highly descriptive as to shape and form; they also speak directly about what things do and what they are used for . . . Actions are embedded in nouns as well . . . Indigenous languages

emphasize integrative views or how things work together . . . Alternatively, an Ojibwe worldview perceives the natural world as one large system that is inseparable from human experience . . . Every sound has its meaning and the words themselves are like hearing a short story. Each individual part of speech creates an image and action in the mind of the hearer, and this creates specificity and resists easy translation . . . Simple translations of words into English need to be avoided because they fail to capture the connectedness of sounds. (pp. 236-238)

As a speaker of English, and an Ojibwe person who knows little Ojibwe and has periodically been trying to learn her cultural language, I know of these challenges. When I was trying to learn Ojibwe, I knew I was losing a lot of the meaning behind Ojibwe words by trying to understand them first in the English language. Yet, as an Indigenous English-speaking researcher, and considering my research topic, having at my disposal translations of the sacred stories is of great importance. I am not fluent in Ojibwe and I only know a few conversational phrases and some verbs about weather and animals. This limits my ability to learn from and hear sacred stories told orally in the Ojibwe language. My fortune lies in the fact that there are many sacred stories reliably and accurately translated into English (as best as the stories can be translated due to nuances lost between languages) and available in print. I will note here that I have incorporated some of the Ojibwe language into my dissertation novel: some of the language appears in the dialogue between characters; the other area where the language appears is in the chapter titles. Translations of the Ojibwe come from my own knowledge of the language, translations provided from referenced texts in this dissertation, from Seven Generations' Ojibwe language CD-ROM *Izhi-NIzha' Amaadiwinan: Messages* (n.d.), and also from the source Reverend Edward F.

Wilson’s (n.d.) *The Ojebway Language: A Manual for Missionaries and Others Employed Among the Ojebway Indians* which is closest to my mother’s Ojibwe family dialect (please see Glossary at back of dissertation for translations of the Ojibwe and Cree languages as they appear throughout the dissertation).

The collected sacred stories in works such as *Sacred Legends* by Ray and Stevens (2003); *Legends from The Forest* by Fiddler and Stevens (1999); and Ellis’ (1995) *Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* are all integral to my research. The editors of these books worked with Elders in presenting the sacred stories just as they were told, helping to ensure cultural accuracy—Ellis has even gone further by providing syllabics of each sacred story on adjacent pages. Works such as these also assist scholars and educators in their research and classroom activities when Elders are not readily available to orally tell the sacred stories. In these books, and others, the voices of the Elders are still present in the sacred stories—they are still story telling—and they are still able to pass on the varied cultural knowledge and cultural customs present in the sacred stories. It is apparent in the works of many scholars of Indigenous education and cultures that they see value of storytelling and sacred stories within education and the classroom (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; White-Kaulaity, 2007). It is my hope that my dissertation may be used within the classroom as a reference which teachers can draw upon to help teach about the culture including, for instance, the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Traditional oral storytelling, in the Anishinawbe and many other Indigenous cultures, has a key role in the rearing, education, and the entertainment of children (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Cajete, 1994; Keeshig-Tobias, 2003). Storytelling has the power to connect with children and adults on personal levels, and creates opportunities for their minds to wander into worlds of their imagination. Listeners hear these stories and most often the stories appeal to them in some

emotional or intrinsic way. We hear stories; we connect with them; we learn from them. Yet, it is not merely the content of the story that holds the appeal and our attention. The teller of stories, whether Elder or teacher, plays a significant role in holding our attention: through the inflection of their voices, the stress of their tones to indicate climactic events within the story, and the compassion they verbally express towards characters and situations (Johnston, 1994). These elements help to engage our own emotional responses to the story as it unfolds. Many emotions contained within a story are conveyed during the storyteller’s ability to pass on the knowledge within those stories by holding the attention of their listeners. Elders who have practiced this oratorical skill or who are natural storytellers, are then able not only to pass on the cultural knowledge and teachings present within sacred stories, but also to do so with vivacity and with the enthusiasm needed to hold the listeners’ attention. Elders are also able to adjust the stories as they tell them, adding in details or embellishments that do not contradict or impede the general plot of the story; in a way, they are responding to the listeners and adjusting the story to their needs or ages or even interest level. Within more contemporary areas in education, the teacher as storyteller in the classroom can also fill such roles—albeit in a broader sense of the term when reading from, for example, printed sacred stories. In printed form, the responsiveness of reader to storyteller is lost. Readers often connect personally to events and characters. However, readers may not always have that background knowledge while reading a particular story, and are not able to readily ask for that background information or be presented it by the storyteller as it is being read. Still, despite any lack of knowledge of background information, readers can still find and make their own meaning and lessons from the story they hear or read. Whatever is learned from a story will vary from reader to reader. Who is to say what one reader learns is not as important or valid as what any other reader learns?

When we learn something from texts, especially if they are Indigenous in context, it is important to be sure that the text is culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive. Classroom teachers should exercise caution when choosing stories for classroom instruction. With a wide variety of books to choose from, it can be difficult to find and recognize the more authentic and accurate versions of sacred stories from those stories which are inaccurate and incorrectly written and presented. Reese (2004) describes this problem:

At first glance, it may seem that there is a plethora of Native American [books] from which teachers can choose. But books chosen from that plethora should be selected carefully. The literary elements (plot, setting, etc.) by which we typically evaluate a story must be combined with the knowledge that [sacred stories] are not simple entertainment. By definition, traditional stories are the means by which a culture's view of the world is passed from one generation to the next. Given that the publishing industry is primarily composed of Euro-Americans who have their own culturally specific worldview, it is easy to see how problems with bias, outside authorship, and adaptation and authenticity arise with the retelling of Native American stories. (pp. 233-234)

In my own experiences, I saw these issues of authenticity directly when I was a high school teacher trying to find appropriate materials to use within the classroom. I also saw these issues of authenticity as an instructor of a teacher's education university program while suggesting materials for future teachers to use within their own classroom and how they could look for culturally appropriate, sensitive, and accurate books and materials. To do this, I turned to Reese's (2004) work where she also lists some guidelines explaining how to choose culturally appropriate texts. In what Reese calls "Desirable Markers of Authenticity" some of these

guidelines for choosing texts include: "Illustrations of setting, characters, and tribal artifacts accurately reflect the [Nation] specified . . . Retold folktales, myths, and legends [Sacred Stories] specify the source for the story and details regarding changes the author made in retelling the story. The retold story reflects the [Nation] from which it originated" (p. 254). For the purpose of this dissertation, I also looked into other resources that shared similar points of view. In another article on a similar topic from Reese (2007), she identifies "Undesirable Elements that Signify Stereotypes and Bias", some of which include: "Counting books in which "Indians" are presented as items to count . . . Native characters portrayed as unrealistically heroic, with no flaws" (p. 254). Slapin, Seale and Gonzales (1992) also share these suggestions in their own publication "How to Tell the Difference: A Guide to Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias." It is apparent still that one should take care in selecting books that are Aboriginal or Indigenous in content, regardless of their published date.

As tellers of sacred stories are teachers within the community, classroom teachers then can be seen as storytellers of curriculum within the classroom. With Elders as traditional storytellers and teachers as storytellers of the curriculum and, in a sense, the world's stories, it is apparent here that sacred stories and those stories that teach about life are integrally important to education and to the self throughout life's development.

The Importance of Oral Traditions and Sacred Stories to the Self and in Life

Sacred stories from the Ojibwe and Cree peoples are central to my dissertation journey primarily because of their closeness to my own Ojibwe culture and the similar sacred stories passed down from my family. These stories contain that culture's traditions, ceremonies, cultural practices, codes of conduct and behaviour, and spiritual beliefs (Friesen, 1999; Kovach, 2009).

Among their capacities to entertain, pass down cultural traditions, ceremonies, dances, songs, and to correct undesired behaviours, sacred stories explain how something in nature came to be and how our interactions with those creatures and other life forms around us lead into actions of established ceremonies of respect for the land and ourselves (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Cajete, 1994; Deloria Jr., 1999). While also embedding cultural belief systems, traditions, and ceremonies within sacred stories, the Anishinawbe peoples were able to explain how the natural environment was shaped and formed. In telling of the formation of land, the stories described "how ancient beings left physical traces, by marking the landscape with the footprints, reshaping natural earth formations, carving out rivers, doing battle with superhuman elementals and moulding giant megafauna down to their present size" (Bruchac, 2005, p. 62). It is through sacred stories that all of the knowledge gained through our Elders and previous generations is passed down (Battiste, 2008). It is to these stories my dissertation is attending.

Connected to the self because of their ability to impart teachings to listeners and tellers, sacred stories and other traditional stories that are passed down have the ability to tell us about ourselves, who we are, our heritage, our culture (Fagan, 2009). As with written forms of communication, oral traditions also carry those teachings of life and human experience. Anishinawbe and Indigenous sacred stories, written and most importantly oral, are often based on experiences and are in many ways relatable to readers because of it. While we can certainly learn from sacred stories put into textual formats, it is the direct oral tradition that is considered by Elders and scholars to be most valuable (Eigenbrod, 2010; Lacourt et. al, 2005). When listening to sacred stories, listeners not only react and respond to individual words, they do so in unique ways that may or may not be shared by others. Listeners respond to the story from the tone and style of speaking performed by the teller of the story (Johnston, 1994). Listeners are

also able to experience the story as it is being told, through *how* the story is told as well as the words used to tell the story. This aspect of cultural storytelling is important to relate because I must acknowledge their significance in the Anishinawbe culture. In connection to my dissertation, it is this facet of the culture that I attempt to echo: I only echo these traditions for the fact that my dissertation will be in print and not true to the tradition of being spoken aloud—because of the time frame of the dissertation process, and to ensure that the dissertation may be accessible to all; however, it is something that could be considered a project after the completion of my dissertation. This oral tradition is echoed within my dissertation novel through the voice of Cocom and Grandpa Benny who share sacred story, teachings and other narratives with Butterfly and other characters.

In some ways, stories help us to connect to each other through the shared emotions and experiences we can connect with in a story. Despite how different our lives may be, we can always connect on some level with a story. In their article on oral tradition and storytelling, Al-Jafar and Buzzeilli (2004) state that teachers help students to question the actions of the characters in terms of their own morals and values. They also agree that while the teller's role is to tell the story, the listener's role is to create meanings from the story based on their own personal interpretation of that story itself. Just as in Anishinawbe culture, listeners create their own understandings of the stories that are told—understandings that are based upon personal experiences in life (Johnston, 1994). Interpreting another's experiences within sacred oral and textual narrative stories is a part of that reinterpretation of the self by learning from the stories of others—what one learns or sees in a story may not be shared with everyone. We should also be aware that when readers have varying points of view and thoughts about a story, neither perspective should be discounted or considered less important. Sacred stories are a means by

which knowledge can be passed down through the generations, teachings those same traditions, ceremonies, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs as they are spoken and listened to (Cajete, 1994; Iseke, 2009; Little Bear, 2000). The telling of sacred stories is not intrusive to the listener who can choose to accept those teachings present in the story, or not, without offence (Castellano, 2000). Yet, in listening to sacred stories, it is not simply a matter of choosing to listen to the teachings in them. The meanings or lessons learned from the sacred stories are for each individual to determine. The meanings or lessons an individual may take from the sacred stories are based upon that individual's own unique experiences in life that help them to understand particular meanings and teachings present in the sacred stories.

Sacred stories and oral traditions amongst Anishinawbe and other Indigenous cultures are by no means easy to understand fully and completely. One reason for this is that the listeners ultimately decide what they *feel inclined* to learn from the sacred stories, and not what they are *expected* to learn. In other words, while many may learn the same thing from a story, other may learn something different, but both should be respected. Cajete (1994) explains that, "the ability to use language through storytelling, oratory, and song was highly regarded by all tribes as a primary tool for teaching and learning. This was because the spoken or sung word expressed the spirit and breath of life of the speaker, and thus was considered sacred" (p. 33). Sacred stories, spirituality and beliefs, and the language itself are the sources of knowledge and content that is in the teachings and explanations of why things are the way they are in this world. These sacred stories, which are a part of the spoken language and oral tradition in my own and other cultures, are respected and are integral to the knowledge and the content of the teaching that is passed on. These various features within the Anishinawbe culture are the sources from which knowledge

can be accessed and passed on through experience and learning, and through learning within the classroom. But what else can we learn from the sacred stories?

Concerning Sacred Stories and the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Morals, Codes of Conduct and Accepted Cultural Behaviours

Sacred stories, told and read as we grow from infancy to adulthood and beyond, teach us about our culture: they help us to understand our culture and ourselves by what we can learn and take from the sacred stories. But sacred stories hold much more than these elements of teaching about ourselves and our culture. Sacred stories teach people the importance of morals (as deemed important by our specific cultures and communities), of the codes of conduct and accepted cultural behaviours, and of the values and virtues significant within the culture. This facet is important in connection with my research question in that I ask how these lessons of sacred story and lessons learned in my own life can be connected through some of the themes and issues from sacred stories, sacred story characters, and the Seven Grandfather Teachings that are a part of the sacred stories—all of which I discuss in greater detail in Part Three of my dissertation.

While it is generally accepted that sacred stories contain within them many morals, it is not the point of the sacred stories to point these out to listeners and readers—the morals within the sacred stories are intended to be individually learnt. This form of the sacred story contrasts greatly with Euro Western fairytales where there are often morals of the story indicated at the end. To support this view, Piquemal (2003) explains that (a) any meanings derived are constructed individually, (b) meanings may arise much later on after first listening to the sacred story, or (c) that several occasions of listening to the sacred story may take place before a meaning or teaching becomes apparent. However, as Castellano (2000) points out, the Elder who

passes on these stories has the obligation to consider whether or not the listeners are ready to use that knowledge responsibly. In the same vein, it should also be the responsibility of classroom teachers to ensure that the sacred stories they choose to include within classroom instruction are appropriate for the age of their students and not necessarily based upon their grade—because of the fact that some sacred stories include content of a more mature nature.

Sacred stories are also a means to help pass down culturally acceptable codes of conduct, behaviour and social guidelines. For Anishinawbe culture, these are also morals and values, which help to develop character. Seven Grandfather Teachings education, examines the broad concepts of right and wrong, or good and bad habits, but also shows these habits either through real life examples or through the study of examples in stories. It is focused on values that are concepts that society and individuals care about and which are held in high regard because of their practical constancy over time. Values can be learned in many ways. We can see values passed down through the Ojibwe and Cree generations (as they are specific to this dissertation), especially through the Seven Grandfather Teachings as expressed and conveyed through sacred stories.

Codes of conduct and behaviour are often depicted in stories through actions of human, animal, demigod, or trickster characters: what to do, what not to do, how to act, and so on (Benton-Banai, 1988). Such codes of conduct and behaviours can be seen within Dr. Clare Brant’s 1990 report on the most common Native Ethics and Rules of Behaviour within communities of Northwestern Ontario. Brant, the first Indigenous psychiatrist in Canada, writes of nine codes of conduct and behaviour:

- 1) Non-interference: inhibits argument and advice-giving; non-intrusive modelling; voluntary cooperation
- 2) Anger: not be shown (can interfere in daily duties and peace within community)
- 3) Time: flexible concept of time; the “right” time to do things

- 4) Sharing: group survival: take what you need, share freely
- 5) Excellence: excellence expected, gratitude shown for exceptional accomplishments
- 6) Protocol: protocol in ceremony, manners; not articulated (non-interference)
- 7) Teaching and Learning: instruction based on modelling; practice and observation; observation until time is “right”
- 8) Conservation-withdrawal: a reaction through stress
- 9) Democracy: equality; consensus; personal privacy; autonomy

Although these codes of conduct can be taught separately, they could also be included as part of an Anishinawbe Seven Grandfather teachings education that would, in part, use sacred story to help teach these social values and behaviour expectations (Benton-Banai, 1988; Ellis, 1995). As a part of the theoretical framework of my dissertation, these generally accepted codes of conduct are integrated into the story through various characters’ actions and speech (I discuss these in greater detail in Part Three as separate theory in my theoretical framework from the Seven Grandfather Teachings). The Seven Grandfather Teachings are just one of the culturally-connected Anishinawbe perspectives—also including perspectives that inform my theoretical framework like connecting land and animals, all of which I discuss in greater detail in part 3—with which I examine my research question. This perspective of the Seven Grandfather Teachings is connected not only to my Anishinawbe background, but also to other Canadian Indigenous peoples as well; however when I speak specifically to the Seven Grandfather Teachings, I speak to them primarily from my own cultural background and informed by other works that inform my discussion of those teachings.

The Importance of the Heroic in Sacred Stories and Seven Grandfather Teachings Education

Sacred stories teach about the culture, about virtues and morals, about codes of conduct and behaviour, and help us make sense of the world and our experiences (Kovach, 2009). Sacred stories can use events and actions of particular characters to help teach about the qualities that

help to build a person's character. This aspect is connected through my research question where I ask how characters and the morals and values in Seven Grandfather Teachings are connected through lessons learned from life and sacred story. Sacred stories pass on knowledge about culture and cultural traditions and practices (McKeough, et. al. 2008; Beck and Spielmann, 2006). In other words, sacred stories tell us who we are as people. Whatever the various definitions might involve, the focus is on good morals or values that we enact in our daily lives and through the situations that test those morals or values through the actions we take.

Teaching about character and morals or values and having those teachings intrinsically learned by students is certainly a difficult task. We may ask how teachers can do this. My suggestion is that by including sacred stories as the primary medium in which to teach Anishinawbe Character Education (the morals and values of the Seven Grandfather teachings), teachers can undertake achieving such a goal. Yatta Kanu (2011) in her edited book *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the School Curriculum* discusses how morals or values are embedded within culture. She expresses the need for teachers to understand Aboriginal spirituality as a connection with learning.

The Australian Government's Department of Education has also seen a need for values-based education. Their Department of Education defines values education as "any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity which promotes student understanding and knowledge of values, and which develops the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005a, p. 8). Their Department of Education document *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* sets out this goal for education: "values based education can strengthen students' self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfillment; and help students

exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility" (p. 1). Stemming from this recognized need to bring values into curriculum, their government has also created resources for teachers (from primary to secondary levels) that provide instructional strategies and pedagogy as to how they can incorporate values education into their current curriculum (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, 2007a, 2007b, 2005b). Connected closely to the concept of values are cultural ethics and codes of conduct that play an integral role in the culture of the Ojibwe people. In the province of Ontario, we can see this in Pamela Toulouse's (2008) article *Integrating Aboriginal Teaching and Values into the Classroom*. The Ontario College of Teachers' *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (2014) suggest educators espouse the principle of care that "includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential" and respect that includes "honour[ing] human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development" as well as "respect for spiritual and cultural values" (p. 1). Given that Indigenous students are in classrooms, teachers need to show care and respect for Indigenous knowledge and one way is through respecting sacred stories.

Sacred stories also teach about the ethics and codes of conduct (Brant, 1990), important within Ojibwe and Cree cultures as reflected through sacred story. Traditionally, sacred stories were a principal method used to pass on Aboriginal cultural knowledge (Cajete, 1994; Castellano, 2000). From ceremonies and traditions, to codes of conduct and behaviour, to cultural spirituality and beliefs, sacred stories "record the history of a people" (Castellano, 2000, p. 31). Listening to and reading stories over time helps the listener and reader learn how to see the story from many sides, gaining different knowledge, understanding ethics and codes of conduct in a greater depth, and learning from it every time the story is told; the teachings in Sacred Stories help us learn, over time, who we are so we can become who we were meant to be

(Iseke-Barnes, 2009). We grow when we look back again on a sacred story and can take new things from it—when we have already taken new things from life to help build our experiential and inner knowledge. Sacred stories help us “develop a deeper understanding of the social world—how others think, why they behave they way they do, and the implications people’s actions hold for others” (McKeough et. al., 2008, p. 150). Sacred stories are a means by which teachers can help to teach about the morals and values that help to make a good person. With this in mind, I am reminded here of Ellis’ work *Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* (1995) that describes “thematic episode” stories called pâstâmôwin stories. These pâstâmôwin stories use clear “moral” messages which are often told plainly so that listeners understand what the message is without much guessing (Ellis, 1995). These types of stories, I feel, would be especially effective for use within classrooms of mixed-background students who may be more familiar with Euro Western fairytales and could relate more easily to pâstâmôwin forms of story.

When we think of a classroom of students from Indigenous backgrounds, Indigenous researchers including Donovan (2007), Graveline (1998), Iseke-Barnes (2009), and Kanu (2002) feel that including their culture into the curriculum in meaningful ways not only affects greatly students’ motivation to learn, but also makes the curriculum more inclusive and engaging to those students. As educators, we know that in order to meaningfully engage students in a curriculum, that curriculum has to be directly meaningful to students. Students also need the opportunity to practice and engage with their culture within the curriculum (Archibald, 1995; Ball, 2004; Cajete, 1994; Marker, 2006). Incorporating cultural elements (such as language, cultural traditions, and other traditional knowledges and practices) into a more Western curriculum helps to create a more meaningful education and a system that works for a diverse

student population (Smith, 1999). More recently the educational system in general has taken larger steps in helping teachers become more aware of Anishinawbe and other Indigenous cultures (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). An example of this effort can be seen in a guide for teachers which discusses (in general terms) the Aboriginal culture and students in the classroom as published by Lakehead Public Schools in Thunder Bay, Ontario (Baxter and Farrell-Morneau, 2013). Cultural elements, cultural ethics and codes of conduct, morals or values within Seven Grandfather Teachings education, and the inclusion of Aboriginal and Indigenous content into curriculums are all features that I reflect upon within my dissertation novel (in varying degrees) and act as a part of the setting and characters which affect key events and plot.

Since the morals in the Seven Grandfather Teachings are among those most commonly shared among many other cultures and societies, I would propose that incorporating the use of the Seven Grandfather Teachings into a type of Indigenous Education would help to solve this problem of needing to include culturally relevant content. Not only would students be reading and hearing these stories, but also they could turn their gained knowledges into their own stories about morals and virtues. But what can also drive the stories children hear, and which inspire them to listen and learn and potentially write their own character stories? While implementing a sacred story-based Seven Grandfather Teaching Education, stories featuring a hero (like Chakabesh or Iyas) assist readers to see clearer morals or values through the actions (or inactions) of the hero. It is the hero's ability to learn and grow that teaches about character and the good qualities of the self when the reader/listener chooses to learn them.

Children and even older readers often are able to relate to heroic characters. In Anishinawbe and other Indigenous Sacred Stories, the hero does not have to be human. Often, heroes take the form of animals, birds, and even the natural elements. Their feats and actions and

their respectful interactions with other creatures help to demonstrate their virtuous qualities. It is through the excitement of Weesquachak (a trickster who makes permanent changes to animals, plants, humans, and geographic landscapes) mixing up the furs of wolves and enjoying their struggle in finding their own fur again or Weesquachak trying to snare flying geese that help students engage in the sacred stories and also teach them the Seven Grandfather Teachings along the way and teach them about character in the process (Ellis, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003).

In the sacred stories of the Anishinawbe culture typically the characters are not given other titles than their name. The characters just *are*. Even the name "trickster" is not a traditional name. In the Preface of her edited book *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, Deanna Reder (2010) states that the term "trickster" is most likely "the invention of a nineteenth-century anthropologist" (p. vii) named Daniel Binton "who first used the word to describe the category of characters found within Indigenous mythic traditions" (pp. viii-ix). In Binton's *The Lenape and Their Legends* (1885), he writes of the *Myths and Traditions of the Lenape*. In a sub-section entitled "Cosmogonical and Cultural Myths", Binton provides the following paragraph in which we see his use of the term "Trickster":

The Algonkins, as a stock, had a well-developed creation-myth and a culture legend, found in more or less completeness in all their branches. Their culture hero, their ancestor and creator, he who made the earth and stocked it with animals, who taught them the arts of war and the chase, and gave them the Indian corn, beans and squashes, was generally called *Michabo*, The Great Light, but was also known among the Narragansetts of New England as *Wetucks*, The Common Father; among the Cree as *Wisakketjck*, the Trickster; by the Chippeways as

Nanabozho (*Nenâboj*), the Cheat; by the Black Feet as *Natose*, Our Father, or *Napiw*; and by the Micmacs and Penobscots as *Glus-Kap*, the Liar. (p. 130)

Despite a potential discussion of these characters, which I will not delve into during this dissertation, we see here a clear reference to Weesquachak or Wisakketjck (as Binton spells it) as Trickster. Even so, we see from Weesquachak many morals or values that give us a broader picture of him as a character. In sacred story we see his perseverance and determined nature often. But, we also often see negative attributes and morals or values (I will discuss Weesquachak in greater detail in Part Three). Most often the so-called heroes or heroines portray virtuous as well as flawed character morals or values. It is this balance of both good and bad morals or values that is unique to characters who are often present across many Indigenous sacred stories—the heroes are flawed. It is also the richness and complexity that encourages learning lessons from these characters.

Although cleverness is not one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, it is cleverness that is most likely the most prominent characteristic of the character of Chakabesh. Although he does not always demonstrate the best judgement, we still learn from his behaviours. A quick learner and quick to develop ideas, Chakabesh, a young man who often ignores his sister's sound advice only to later see the importance of it, frequently resorts to cleverness, and, sometimes, bad behaviour, to tackle sticky situations. Chakabesh, who has good intentions, but also has bad habits and questionable morals (as we see in the sacred story from Ray and Stevens' (2003) *Chakabesh and the Giant Women* where he spies on the half-dressed giant women and becomes aroused), is a character most relatable to students not only because of his character strengths and his character flaws, but also because he is portrayed a young or adolescent man, students may relate or find humour in him and learn from the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Leanne Simpson (2011), in her work *Dancing on Turtle's Back*, writes of how story carries so much meaning with and in our lives. Simpson writes of the Seven Grandfather Teachings as Grandmother Teachings, saying that "Kokum Dibaajimowinan [Grandmother Teachings] were often explained by describing a specific attribute in a person; that is, the teachings were personalized. So the old people would describe the teachings using someone who embodied the teachings as an example" (p. 125). Often, these teachings can be seen in heroic stories that feature Weesquachak and Chakabesh. For instance, in some sacred stories featuring Weesquachak, he both tricks and is "in turn tricked or meets his come-uppance . . . a lesson in proper behaviour is drawn from his misdirected activity, or both" (Ellis, 1995, p. xxvii). Chakabesh's behaviours often lead him into trouble, despite his sister's cautioning (Ellis, p. xxviii).

We not only see his flaws, but we also learn from them and we can understand that heroes, too, are imperfect, both in morals or values and perhaps also in physical appearance. To explain, Chakabesh is often portrayed with small stature and a lisped speech that "characterise him as a childlike and loveable, even if a mischievous and inquisitive little scamp" (Ellis, 1995, p. xxvii). Knowing that these characters also have flaws and are portrayed with human attributes, and not idealistic or unattainable traits, students can better relate to heroes of sacred story. Moreover, the connection of hero to Seven Grandfather Teachings Education seems to fit easily into scenarios of real-world experience in which students live.

These hero stories, which Ellis (1995) describes as a part of traditional discourse known in Cree as *âtalôhkanâ*, lay in the same field with stories known in Cree as *pâstâmwîn* or "thematic episodes". These are stories set in scenes of real life but that have "magic, conjuring, but it all happens in an otherwise normal setting, the real world with people involved. Serious

social values are inculcated; and many of these stories, possibly with editing, might well provide material for school texts" (Ellis, 1995, p. xxxiii). These pâstâmwîn also teach "lessons in living . . . the moral is not merely in the culmination of the account but is explicitly stated to make sure no one misses the point" (Ellis, 1995, p. xxiii). Although my dissertation novel contains reference to sacred story "hero" characters, my dissertation is still a story of my own creation and, as mentioned before, fits between the half-truth and half-fictional world that Highway discussed.

Incorporated into the novel portion of my dissertation is the issue of struggling with identity as an Anishinawbe person. Many Indigenous scholars' works touch upon the issue of struggling with one's identity (Andrews & Olney, 2007; Gosse, 2005; Sanderson, 2006). Additional themes dealing with struggles in life and perseverance help to enrich the novel portion of my dissertation. These themes are also connected to the character of the Windigo. To explain, serving primarily as cautionary tales, sacred stories of Windigo have been used to teach about hardships and obstacles one may face during periods of a person's life. As a fearsome character that can take control of a person's soul and cause destruction to families and communities, the Windigo is a character that primarily appears in stories of wintertime and starvation (Ellis, 1995; Johnston, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003). Other sacred stories characters include Rolling Head who, typically, is seduced by an evil spirit (either in the form of snakes or vines) and then attacks and kills her husband, and spends the rest of the story pursuing her sons (Ray & Stevens, 2003). What also drives interest in such sacred stories are the conflicts characters face with themselves and situations they are in.

Rationale for Approach

In my dissertation, I draw upon specific knowledges within Sacred Stories and the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and especially where cultural protocols and ethical considerations are paramount (Kovach, 2009, p. 98). A part of the cultural protocols here are connected to morals and values found in the Seven Grandfather Teachings. The use of life history and personal experiences allow for many of these teachings and morals to be embedded within the dissertation story.

Vine Deloria (1994), who is of the Sioux Nation, writes, "The nation's stories reflect what is important to a group of people as a group. Historical events were either of the distant past and regarded as such or vivid memories of the tribe that occupied a prominent important place in the people's perspective and understanding of their situation" (p. 100). I provide life history and personal experiences from my own history into Butterfly's life story and in ways that she gains understandings about herself and her choices in life. Some of my life history and personal experiences (primarily from my high school years) appear in the novel, either as they truly happened or embellished. Some of the events that happen to Butterfly have also been fictionally created. I incorporate into the novel sequences where Weesquachak the Trickster appears. These are drawn from my interpretation of his mannerisms, his behaviour, his personality, and his character traits, drawing upon my understandings of traditional story characters to develop story sequences for the novel and drawing upon personal experiences from my own life. These are explored in greater detail in Part Three (Epilogue) of this dissertation.

Why choose Indigenous Story as the primary method and methodology for this dissertation? When I look at my desire to tell my story, within my culturally located oral traditions, the pursuit of storytelling seems quite rational. I could keep my work to an oral narrative, which would be in keeping with cultural traditions of storytelling; yet, I want to ensure

that the work is more widely accessible to my audience. Including an oral narration of the work is something that I could consider at a later point in time.

On the topic of writing story as research, I will speak to Kovach's (2009) work on Indigenous Methodologies where she explains this motive quite clearly:

Form and content must reflect the conceptual, the enigmatic, the tangible, and the schema of our frameworks. The insights rise up from the passion and turmoil of self-in-relation. If it all comes together, the process cannot be separated from the product because they belong together, they complete each other. Making meaning within Indigenous inquiry demands this much. (p 129)

Kovach's words help to further solidify my reasons for writing story as dissertation. By writing story, I better reflect the oral traditions of my culture—my word choices, my descriptions of setting and character, the development and unfolding of events are all aspects used in storytelling and Indigenous storytelling as methodology. Paula Gunn Allen (1986) also reflects this same idea of oral traditions:

American Indian novelists use cultural conflict as a major theme, but their work shows an increasing tendency to bind that theme to analogues in whatever tribal oral tradition they write from. So while the protagonists in Native American novels are in some sense bicultural and must deal with the effects of colonization and an attendant sense of loss of self, each is also a participant in a ritual tradition that gives their individual lives shape and significance. (p. 79)

Gunn Allen also points to ideas and themes that are interwoven within my dissertation story. For instance, the protagonist "Butterfly" faces a struggle of identity; a loss of sense of self and her

life is shaped and given further significance through that life-experience (I discuss Butterfly in greater detail in Part Three). These two facets of "Butterfly's" character are reflected in my own life. These facets also demonstrate how the dissertation story becomes and is personal narrative as seen through a sub-section of sacred story as described by C. Douglas Ellis (1995) later in this section. In my writing, insights about the dissertation themes, about my culture, about the representations and all of the events that happen in the dissertation story are all a part of that passion and turmoil which Kovach and Gunn Allen speak to in the above quotations.

Yet, with some of the more sensitive topics I write about, and as King (2003) also writes, "I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives" (p. 9). In my writing I have to be cautious not only *what* I write when I write of my personal experiences and some of the harsher realities that many Indigenous students face, but *how* I write it. On the topic of writing, King (2003) also says, "you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (p. 10). With sensitive topics, there should be some considerations in mind when writing story and the potential effects on the writer and even potentially the reader. Although it is good to share personal story so that others in similar situations may learn how another person overcame those obstacles, some considerations should be kept in mind. For instance, depending on the personal experiences told, the writer could become a target of ridicule or prejudice or simply be viewed differently by their peers or readers.

Another consideration would be about fictionalizing tragedies and traumatic experiences. Because of the already sensitive nature of death and dying, being respectful of those who have passed, or the idea of death in general, should be carefully considered. The inclusion of some scenes in which Butterfly was harming herself were taken from personal experiences during my

adolescence. I worried about the perception that readers would apply to me as a person. I also worried that it would potentially upset those who read the story. But personal experiences are meant to teach others some moral or behaviour attribute. I would rather help someone through his or her own experience by sharing my own, than not having told my story in the first place because I might potentially upset them. Douglas Gosse’s (2005) published dissertation *Jackytar* from this Indigenous researcher who has incorporated personal experience into his research, providing a narrative that centers on the main character Alex Murphy, who is a Newfoundlander - Mi’kmaq and French, and who is gay, and faces many harsh realities from youth into adulthood as he struggles with his gender and race identity and the relationships with people in his life. In many ways, the writing of fiction lends itself for writers to openly discuss their emotions, their life experiences and in a way that can also connect with their field of research. We all create our own perceptions and thoughts about our own and others’ experiences; and we are all meant to take whatever meanings we can from the stories we read. It is not my place here to tell you what my perspective is, but I ask that you choose your own.

The focus of my dissertation is to understand identity and Anishinawbe culture, while blending those topics with Anishinawbe cultural literatures and cultural knowledge. My dissertation is focused on educational benefits and is geared for education of youth—I discuss this education topic in Part Three. Dissertations that also take up discussion of identity and culture and focus on the production of a book-length novel as part of the dissertation, include Rishma Dunlop’s *Boundary Bay* (2000) and Gosse’s *Jackytar* (2005). In a similar vein, my dissertation incorporates a book-length manuscript.

I will tell you a story . . .

Part Two

Memengwaawid: To Be A Butterfly

By Amy Farrell-Morneau

Figure 4



Figure 4. Watercolour. "Butterfly" by Amy Farrell-Morneau.

"One night as Wee-sa-kay-jac slept, a dream came to him. He saw many creatures shaped like himself, singing, dancing and pounding on drums" (from Wee-sa-kay-jac and the Animals in Ray & Stevens, p. 24)

Chapter 1

Dream

Bawaajig

Mid-August

I could smell the earth in the air, and the scent of trees and flowers as the wind fanned across my face. I could hear the sounds of someone jogging. No. Not jogging. Walking quickly. As if walking after someone who was further up ahead. And then I realized I was the one walking, briskly. I felt the cool soil under my bare feet and the bits of moist dirt that became stuck between my toes. I felt the air rush into my lungs as I took deep breaths and hurried up the path. I looked up then and saw the dirt path bending sharply around the corner at the top of a small hill. The shadows of the trees and the sunlight shining through them made irregular, moving patterns on the ground in front of me as the wind swayed the trees around and the leaves swished lightly above me. As I rounded the corner at the top of the hill, the sunlight beamed through the trees so brightly, I squeezed my eyes shut.

I opened my eyes and found myself staring at the ceiling and the glow in the dark stars stuck there above my bed. I heard Mom yelling for me from the kitchen. Breakfast was ready. Mom always made breakfasts Monday morning. She said that it was a good start to the week to have a nice breakfast on Monday, and that it made Mondays seem a bit more welcomed. Why should Mondays have such a bad rap?

It was a couple of weeks before school and, as my parents have done every year since I could remember, they started the weeks before school as if we were already in school: waking up early, having breakfast, brushing my teeth and such, getting dressed. I hated it—getting up early when it wasn't even school, I mean. But, it did make starting school a bit easier I guess. Plus, there were the Mondays to look forward to.

So, I did my morning routine that became my routine for the mornings during school. I hopped downstairs and ate breakfast: pancakes and bacon. I loved dipping my bacon in syrup; don't ask me why. After I ate, and did all those other things leading up to me getting dressed, I found myself sitting on the edge of my bed, staring into my closet. Staring at the summer clothes in my closet. Staring at last year's school clothes. Staring at last year's school clothes that I got sick of during the summer and decided not to wear again this year; and tried as hard as I could to wear them out. I was going into grade eleven. I was going to be a junior this year and I needed to look less like a grade-niner. I poked through the closet, flipping through the shirts I didn't want to wear again, the pants I didn't want to wear again, and the skirts that, surprisingly, I still liked. I threw on a decent grey t-shirt, some white ankle socks, and a dark grey corduroy skirt and trotted downstairs, jumping over the last two steps and back into the kitchen. Ishkode and Marguerite were at the table, finally.

Ish was stuffing his face full of pancakes that were soaked and dripping in syrup. I could see a long gooeey drip falling from his mouth, sliding down his chin and plopping back onto his plate. Marguerite, or Ettie as we all called her, was ready to go out, her hair already washed and straightened poker straight with the straightening iron she got for her birthday in July even though her hair was already straight enough. She was neatly cutting her pancakes into triangles, dipping each buttered piece into the syrup that had its own section on her plate. Ralphie, our sable-coloured sheltie, hovered at Ish's chair, waiting for some food to be dropped or given to him. I plopped into a chair next to Ish and snuck Ralphie a piece of bacon when no one was looking. I smiled at the thought that everybody else probably did the same.

We got Ralphie a few years ago after my aunt's dog had a litter. Ish was the most excited; it was to be mostly his dog, according to Ish anyway. He even named the dog. And rather than giving it a dog name, he wanted to give it a more human name, so the dog would be more like a human friend. Not that Ish is a loner or anything, he's a little charmer that one. In any case, the two are inseparable and Ralphie and Ish are always together. Ralphie even has a cushion bed in Ish's room.

Looking around the kitchen, I realized someone was missing.

"Where's Dad?" I asked.

"Oh, he walked to the corner to get the paper," Mom said, washing up some dishes in the sink.

"Oh, okay, I forgot," I said as I slid my way to the fridge and poured myself some apple juice. Dad had a morning routine too when we were in school. He'd always go down to the corner of the street and grab a newspaper from the yellow box.

Just then, Dad came in from the back door and shouted very sternly, "Is everyone up and getting ready?"

"Yes, they're up," Mom called back. "Save your father some food, Ish," I looked over at Ish who was just piling the rest of the bacon onto the plate. Then I watched him scrape some of the slices onto Dad's empty plate.

"Smells good!" Dad grinned as he came in and sat into his usual chair. He stuck his fork into the pile of pancakes and put them onto his plate, then soaked them in maple syrup.

"Mom?" I asked as casually and nicely as I could. "I need some new school clothes, some shirts and more skirts . . . could we go shopping today?"

"You don't need any pants?" Mom asked taking a seat at the table and glancing at the front page of the paper.

"I decided to swear off pants this year," I said, staring down at my skirt.

"What about in winter?" she said, not so much a question but a statement and giving me *the* look.

"I'll wear leggings or thick pantyhose, or I'll wear pants on the way and take them off at school." I was desperate. I really wanted to wear skirts this year. I wanted to look more feminine and grown up. I didn't want to wear jeans anymore. I wanted to look a bit different. No girl at school wore skirts regularly, well, unless they were wearing a cheerleading outfit. But cheerleading wasn't my forte.

"I don't mind, I'm just worried what you'll do when it's freezing out. But if that's what you want," Mom said. "What do you think Donal?" My Mom grew up in a more traditional home. She was Ojibwe and my Cocom, my Mom's Mother, "lived off of the land" as some would say. She hunted and trapped and fished for their meat, well for most of the meat anyway. In our culture, women wore dresses as a sign of respect for their womanhood. Well, that's how I understand it anyway. I kind of like that idea, and when I think about it more it makes me feel all the better about my decision to wear skirts and dresses only this year. It helps me feel a bit more . . . what's the word? . . . attached? . . . to my culture.

"You're going to freeze your legs off," Dad said. In that little sentence he had interrupted my little excited high. He was always quick on practicality and telling you things as he saw them. Some people might be irritated by that sort of thing, but I was usually glad knowing that he would tell you the truth of something rather than sugar coating it and you keep behaving like an idiot. My Dad's opinion was important to me—he was honest. But this time I pouted at him as he just continued to chew on his bacon and stare at me. After a few more seconds his cold stare warmed and his shoulders relaxed. "You better dress warm somehow. If you think you're going to be wearing skirts and nothing on your legs and expect not to freeze, think again."

"I'll wear thick leggings or something during the winter, I promise I don't want to freeze. I won't freeze. I'll stay warm," I smiled at Dad.

"We'll go shopping this afternoon and get you some warm leggings and tights. I think Ettie needs to get some new clothes too anyway," Mom added.

"Yeah, I need some new pants. A lot of mine have holes and little tears everywhere. I'd like some new jeans with designs on the back pockets. Mine were too plain last year. And some ballet flats," Ettie fiddled with her nails at the table. She always had perfect nails, straight and long. I used to bite mine, but last year I decided to stop 'cause my nails had looked so bad compared to hers and I was starting to hide my hands. Now, my nails were nice—but not as nice as Ettie's. I didn't like them too long though 'cause they got in the way of my craft projects and just day-to-day stuff.

"Hey!" Ish suddenly piped in. "What about me?" He had actually finished eating, and gulped down a huge glass of orange juice. It's a miracle he hasn't choked on anything yet. He's like a seagull, that kid.

"Your Dad can take you shopping this afternoon too, okay? I know you need new pants for school. Almost all of yours have holes in the knees from the summer. Make sure you get him three pairs of pants for school and some gym clothes and gym shoes, okay Don?" Mom said all this as she finished her coffee and looked through the paper. She handed it to Dad who, after nodding at her and winking at Ish, promptly started reading the front page.

Ish and Dad decided that they're going to go bike down to the nearby department store and get his pants and school stuff there. Dad loves biking and Ish caught on this summer when Dad had bought him a new bike and helmet for his birthday in July.



After shopping that afternoon, I went to my room and laid out my new skirts and shirts on my bed and thought about all the combinations of outfits I could make. With my collection of plain and patterned shawls that I used as scarves, and my beaded bracelets that I had made on a loom during the summer, I knew I'd look unique and more grown up and definitely more girly! I knew Ettie would look effortlessly modern and cool, like she always did, and when she skipped into my room and hopped onto my bed, she stared at my layout of clothes.

"You're not going to look cool in that stuff, you know," she snickered.

"I don't want to look cool. I don't want to look like everybody else, like you do," I snapped back, strengthening my voice so she'd know I was serious and didn't want to get into a brawl over something as silly as this. She tended to try to poke fun at me or challenge me over little things. It really was very irritating, and she knew it.

"Well, you're more of the artsy one anyway," she said, picking up a pretty purple wool knee-length skirt that I had seen first in one of the stores and that I knew she wanted too. After a quiet pause, she spoke again.

"This is my last year in high school, you know," she was now picking at a piece of tied yarn on my quilt that Mom made. Mom had made each of us quilts last Christmas; she had even brought us to the fabric store and helped us pick out matching patterns and materials to put in the quilt. My quilt was soft purples and yellows and pale greens with a bit of pink, and the border of it all was cream coloured. Ettie's was full of polka dots and lines, it looked very modern, very cool, just like her. Ish's, well it was all bold colours and rockets and stars and bolts—he was very into superhero stuff.

I pulled the tags off the clothes and put them in the laundry basket. "I know," I looked at Ettie. She seemed a bit sad; her eyes weren't sparkly and smiling. I thought she'd be excited to go to university next year. After this, I had two more years of high school left; I tried not to think about it too much right now. "Do you know what you're going to take?"

"I was thinking maybe Engineering and Architecture or something," she said, smiling a little.

"Well, you were always good at drawing buildings," I laughed at her and she chuckled a bit, which was nice to see. Ettie could be so serious sometimes.

Then, we both heard quick stomping up the stairs and Ish burst into my room pulling out a plethora of superhero shirts that Dad had bought for him and, of course, the three pairs of jeans and the gym clothes that he didn't seem as excited about. What could beat a boy's love of superheroes?



I was in a canoe that seemed to be moving on its own. I was in a stream with bulrushes and cattails and large boulders on each side of me. I could see dragonflies flitting around the canoe chasing after small bugs and water spiders scooting across the water away from me. The water was clear and I could see the muddy bottom. When I rounded the corner, there was a huge lake with a few small islands in it. Suddenly, with a paddle in my hands, I made my way to the closest island, fighting some strong waves along the way that threatened to push me further from the island.

When I arrived, I got off, pulled the canoe on the shore of a flat sloping rock, grabbing a packsack from the front of the canoe that I hadn't noticed before. Looking around, I saw thin spruce trees covering most of the rocky island and a lot of dried brush. I saw many tree limbs and branches lying along the shore, years old. As I walked inland, an old path became visible even though it was very much grown over. I followed it and when the path ended, I felt I was in the middle of the island. In the middle of a small clearing that had a fire pit in the middle and the remnants of a wigwam scattered in one area. The fire pit was smoldering still. I could see little trails of smoke coming from the blackened pit. Walking closer, I saw amongst the ashes a rough, clay bowl that was filled with steaming water and the bones of a small animal. A crow suddenly called from the top of a nearby spruce tree. I looked up, and, shielding my eyes from the sun, tried to find the crow. I pressed my eyes shut from the brightness of the sun that seemed to becoming hotter and hotter as I stood there looking around for the crow.

I opened my eyes.

There, I saw my glow-in-the-dark stars, stuck to my ceiling. I had tried to make actual constellations with the stars and ended up buying three packages to cover most of my ceiling with them—Mom said I could as long as I used that poster putty, I think she regretted it after when she saw my ceiling. The Big Dipper was to the right of my bed and Draco to the left. I had other constellations—Orion, Cygnus, Leo, Hercules, scattered elsewhere. But, I could still see them from my bed. Of course, I was only putting in the constellations I knew, and not how they actually appeared in the sky, although, come to think of it, that'd be kind of cool. I'm such a nerd. I loved it.

I smiled and rolled over to look at the time on my alarm clock. It was just before seven-o'clock in the morning. I had woken up fifteen minutes earlier than my alarm. Deciding that I wanted to wear some of my new clothes today, I loaded the clothes into the washing machine and started the wash cycle. Walking back up the basement stairs into the kitchen, my parents were already in there, making coffee and eating cereal and toast. I popped some bread into the toaster, poured myself a glass of milk, and opened the cupboard. Peanut butter or honey? Both! I liked putting a bit of butter on the toast, then some honey, and, finally, a bit of peanut butter on top. It reminded me of Winnie the Pooh, although I don't think he ate peanut butter, but I think Christopher Robin probably did.



Late August

The rest of the week went pretty slowly, dragging on and on until it was suddenly Sunday afternoon and then it felt like the week had rushed by. The leaves on the trees had all fallen off now and were covering the ground: a red and orange, crispy, dewy, ruffled blanket.

It was Friday, and I watched from the front porch steps, sipping on a mug of hot chocolate, as a gust of wind would now and then skitter up some of those fallen leaves, then send them landing somewhere else. If I listened hard enough, I could hear those leaves being blown around, hear as they land with soft crunchy thuds against other leaves. And that's when I saw it. Or at least I think I saw it. Something inside the bush in the front yard, darting in and out. I pegged it all to my tired eyes.

I decided to call Laurel and Zoe and see if they could hang out a bit today before school started. It had been more than a month since Laurel, Zoe and I did anything together and they're my best friends! Mom and Dad, Ish and Ettie and me had been at my Mom's traditional home all July and the beginning of August. Auntie Cynthia and her kids Saagaate and Wolf also came up. And Cocom and Grandpa Benny were there during the whole spring and summer too. Mom's traditional home is a half hour bush-plane flight from a little town that took us almost three hours to drive to from the city. It was worth the long trip though! We went fishing almost every day when it wasn't raining or too cold out. When I thought I couldn't handle eating pickerel anymore, Mom cooked it a different way—corn meal covered, cornflake covered, simmered in tomatoes, plain breaded and fried, boiled, baked with lemon, baked with dill, and fried in bacon grease but Mom only did that one once and Ish had sulked when she refused to do it again. I took canoe rides with Ettie along the nearby shores. We jumped across the rocks along shore from the community cabins and around the bend to ours. We made fishnets and a hammock, and I made duck toys out of those round reeds that grew in the sandy areas next to the beach. We had a campfire almost every night and I swam every day too. I read ten books, mainly because a TV didn't distract me since there was no cable or Internet up there. When Laurel and Zoe came over I told them everything about my time at Mom's traditional home and then jumped into my current plan to wear only skirts and some dresses this year at school.

"Oh, wow! I totally love that idea!" Laurel exclaimed, jumping from my bed and going to my closet, flipping through some of the skirts I had just bought. "Maybe I'll wear more skirts too." That made me smile. At least I wouldn't be the only one wearing skirts. "Wonder what the boys will think," Laurel added in quietly.

"I'm sure as heck not gonna be wearing no—"

"Any," I corrected quickly, giggling.

". . . any . . . skirts every day," Zoe scowled at me. Yeah, I couldn't picture Zoe wearing skirts and dresses every day either but I decided to convert her into wearing one at least once a week. Zoe looked pretty in skirts. But she preferred to wear jeans and baggy sweatshirts from the eighties that she raided from one of her younger aunt's closets.

"How about on Wednesdays then?" I asked her, smiling my biggest smile. When she didn't seem convinced, I whined like a puppy. Laurel giggled.

"Fine," Zoe grumbled and I gave her a hug.

We all decided to bike to the nearby department store and we went shopping for a couple of new skirts for Laurel and a skirt for Zoe which ended up being a long jean one. When we got back, we bounded into the kitchen and showed Mom and she laughed.

"Well, you'll be feeling the winter this year," Mom said. Both Laurel and me groaned. Zoe nodded. "Oh, Saagaate and Wolf just arrived, they're in the living room with Ettie and Ish."

Saagaate and Wolf were my cousins—Ma'iingan was an Ojibwe name and meant Wolf in English; we often just called him Wolf. Their mom, Auntie Cynthia, was my Mom's sister. I hadn't seen Auntie Cynthia and my cousins since Ish's birthday in early July. Auntie Cynthia divorced her husband Gary a few years ago, but nobody really missed him much anymore, well except Saagaate and Wolf probably. He wasn't a very nice guy. He yelled all the time and drank too much and hadn't worked in a couple of years because of the drinking, from what I was told anyway. I never really saw much of him. Mom's family grew up on a reserve, and Cocom and Grandpa Benny still lived there, but they often came to the city to visit their kids. Mom came to school here in town when she was young, met my Dad years later, and had us three kids. Auntie Cynthia had stayed in the community up North but last year she took her kids and moved to the city so she could escape and would be closer to Mom—those two were tight. Auntie has been renting out an apartment in an old house on the other side of town since she left her husband.

I never really hung out with my cousins a whole lot, but only because Saagaate was Ettie's age, and Wolf was Ish's age. We all got along fine when the boys weren't becoming irritating with their screaming loud play fights which usually happened when those two got together. I grabbed a bag of chips from the cupboard and headed into the living room with Zoe and Laurel. We flopped on the floor in front of the couch, passing along the chip bag as we all watched some old action movie that was on TV—Ish and Wolf were acting out the fighting scenes in an empty area by the window behind the couch. Then Dad came in, hearing them, and told them not to break anything. Yeah, that's usually what happened when we're all together. The boys get yelled at and the girls chat and giggle and watch TV. I can't help but smile at it all.

That night, lying in bed wide awake and thinking about what Laurel had said about wanting to wear skirts too, I wondered if I really wanted someone else looking like me. Well, I mean, she wouldn't be looking like me. But it was nice that she was supportive anyway. I distracted myself from the skirt thing and watched the patterns of light and shadows on my ceiling from cars passing by until my eyes became heavy and the glow-in-the-dark stars became less glowy.



There was the path.

I could see myself racing up that hill.

As if I was chasing after something. Or maybe I was running away from something. I couldn't tell which.

Slow, repetitive, soft thuds. I could hear the sounds of my bare feet on the cool, moist soil.

I was looking through my own eyes again and I looked down. I watched as my feet moved, one in front of the other. Each step made my feet dirtier and I felt the soil move between my toes, caking in random spots on the bottom of my feet.

I got to the top of that little hill and rounded the corner, the sunlight still playing hide and seek between the branches and leaves on the trees. A snapping twig made me look further ahead of me.

Someone was there.

Waiting at the end of the path. Someone, a man, who didn't seem to be exactly a person. I couldn't see his face. His hands were dirty. Dirty like someone who works with the earth, who digs in the earth, whose hands handle earth, whose hands are more a part of the earth than any regular person's are. His hair was long, disheveled, black, moving with the wind rather than being pushed by it. A flutter of large wings made me glance away, and when I looked back on the path the man was gone.



Early September, First Day of School

I opened my eyes and found myself staring at my ceiling. It was still dark out and my glow-in-the-dark stars were only a dull glow now. I looked at the red digital numbers on my alarm clock. It was four-fifty-five am. I'd be going to school in three and a half hours. Lying there, trying hard to fall asleep but failing miserably, I decided to plan out my outfit. I decided on a dark purple thick cotton skirt, a black turtleneck, and a grey shawl. I have a purple and black coloured beaded loom bracelet that would also match. I always matched my clothes based on my bracelets, or I'd make the bracelets to match. I love matching colours together. I found that colours that would be seen together in nature would always look good in clothes too.

When seven o'clock came, I hopped into the shower and started my morning routine that the previous week had made something very practiced by now. On the way to school, walking with Ettie and Ish, I couldn't help but remember that dream and the strange man who stood there. I never did see his face and I tried to imagine what it might look like. We walked Ish to the elementary school that was across the street from the high school that Ettie and I went to, teasing him to eat slowly during lunch. Entering the doors to the high school, I wasn't expecting anything out of the norm to happen, but life is always like that isn't it? It always brings you the unexpected.

Part of the morning was spent picking up my timetable (I had already picked out my classes last winter) and making sure that we were still in most of the same classes. The only one we three didn't have together was science. Then, Laurel, Zoe and I found a set of lockers next to each other down the Art and Auto Shop hallway. It already smelled like acrylic paint, wood, and oil in the hallway—I love those smells; they even made me feel artistic.

I quickly filled my locker with some little trinkets and necessities—some cute wooden animal magnets, deodorant, gum, lip balm, and an extra pair of socks and underwear, which I kept in a re-sealable bag. I don't know what's with the socks and underwear. I've just always carried around an extra pair of each.

An hour in the morning was devoted to a school assembly where we were told to be successful and to do the best we could and blah blah don't do drugs and blah blah go talk to the

school counselor blah blah blah. I tuned out most of it, chatting with Laurel and Zoe and making fun of how people's hair looked from the back—there were a lot of strange cow licks out there.

The rest of our classes were really shortened for today. Mrs. Deeley, my English teacher, was nice and made us laugh when she tried to do an impression of a zombie. *Zombies*, apparently, were going to be talked about somehow with this book we'd all read later on. Don't you love to picture them making those zombie noises as they stumble along? *Grrhg, ungggh*. She had also put up a lot of grammar and punctuation posters around the room. What did surprise me was that she put up those Native inspiration sayings posters that you find in those teacher stores or online and stuff. One had caught my eye. It read: "let your dreams run wild and be brave enough to follow." I wrote it with a gold Sharpie on the cover of my English binder.

I had Mr. Harrington in second period who'd teach us a half credit each of Civics and Careers. "Stern, but nice" is what other students had said about him and I haven't made my mind up yet cause so far he just seems stern and needs to laugh more.

The period after lunch was Science. Mrs. Pucci was petite, very petite, and hyperactive too. She bounced around the classroom, using the entire space to deliver her speeches and explain the assignments. She actually made the notion of cells and biology interesting.

In Science, we learned that we'd be dissecting frogs that year using some high-techy and really expensive 3D computer format. I was actually pretty glad; I didn't like the idea of slicing into a dead frog just for science, not like you could eat it after or anything...oh gosh, like I'd eat it anyway even if I could. I wrinkled my nose at the thought.

In the last period, when I had Music, that's where I saw him, and I don't mean Mr. Garrett the music teacher. I saw a particular student in music, and, yes, he was the typical cliché: he was tall and handsome, with short, blonde hair. He sat behind me in the music room where there were different leveled platforms for us to sit on, so we could all see the music teacher, Mr. Garrett. The course prospectus was passed up along the rows, starting with mine, and when it got to me, I turned back and reached my arm out to pass them along. The boy took them from me, smiling. His teeth were even and white, his lips were nicely full but not too much for a guy. I smiled back and I was sure I started to blush and that everyone knew it and that everyone was staring, or at least just Zoe and Laurel were.

When class was over, he, the tall and handsome cliché, followed behind me and caught up to me as I headed towards my locker. He kept pace with me for a few steps before speaking, "I saw you in English class this morning."

"Yeah, with Mrs. Deeley," I smiled at him again, looking more carefully at his face. His eyes were almost grey.

"She seems interesting," he smiled again, pausing before continuing to talk. "I switched schools to go here this year. I heard the music teacher was better; this school wins way more competitions than the others. I play the saxophone."

"Yeah. You play the saxophone?" I asked. I was curious that he played the saxophone because the music class was swarming with twelve or so boys fighting over who will be one of the three guitarists. "Why saxophone?"

"Well, tenor sax if you wanna be specific," he grinned at me, lifting his hands into the air by his head. "Oh man, jazz! It's all for the jazz!" I couldn't help but smile.

Although I was keen on many types of music (well all but rap or country), and although my Mom loved her country music and my ears cringed at the sound of it for some reason, I never really listened to any jazz. Ever. "I don't know too much about jazz, to be honest," I paused, not wanting to disappoint him about my not knowing any jazz. "I really like sixties music though."

"Yeah, yeah, good decade," he nodded and paused for a moment in the hallway, stopping me by gently touching my elbow. "You know, I'm gonna burn you a CD tonight."

"Oh, you don't have to do that," I said, but I didn't really mean it. I wanted him to burn me a CD. I'm sure he could see me blush, but he didn't seem to notice.

"Yeah, totally. I'll throw in some Miles Davis and some Nina Simone too. Some jazz, soul and blues music for ya!" I could tell he was already thinking of the songs he wanted to put on it. I was actually looking forward to listening to it; new music was always good to have. Plus it would probably make me feel a little special, getting a burned CD from a guy at school that I just met. The new guy. The cute guy. Well, it wasn't like he was a stranger; I wouldn't have to worry about anything.

"Thanks," was all I could say, smiling and too distracted and shy to say much else about it.

"My name's Erik, by the way, spelled with a 'K'," he added. "My Mom was very into Viking books when she was pregnant with me."

I laughed. "My name's Butterfly . . . everyone just calls me Butter," he just smiled and nodded at me.

At my locker, Laurel and Zoe surrounded me, having hung back as Erik and I talked.

"Who was that?" Laurel-the-gossiper asked.

"Who was who?" I teased her, knowing whom she meant. I grinned, packing away my schoolbooks into my locker.

"The boy. I saw you two talking down the hallway," she shoved my arm, urging me to tell her. It was pretty funny and I took my time, pretending that I couldn't remember his name. "Ohhh come on!" she whined.

"It's Erik," I laughed it out, throwing my backpack over my shoulder and carrying my coat in my arm. Zoe stood by, closing her locker, smirking at Laurel.

"You're so sad," Zoe teased and chided, and Laurel answered her by sticking her tongue out. "She would've told us eventually, you always gotta squeeze things out of her before she gets the chance to tell us herself."

"I do not," Laurel started, and then paused. "Okay, fine."

As we walked out of the school and down the street we chatted about boys. Well, Laurel and I chatted mostly about boys. I wondered what Mom was going to make for supper. I was hoping for chicken and dumplings.

"To face ourselves alone in silence, and to love ourselves because the Creator has made us beautiful are things that every developing human being needs to learn" (from The Sacred Tree by Lane et al., 1984, p. 56).

Chapter 2

Secret Crush and Mean Girl

Giimooj dush Manadis a Kwense

As I approached my locker the next day at school, Laurel and Zoe were already there, waiting for me, grinning from head to toe.

"What?" I laughed and Laurel hopped aside to reveal something taped on my locker. It was a burned CD. "I kind of didn't think he'd actually make me one."

"Oh, whatever," Zoe chided. "You're not an ugly duckling you know."

"I know," I said, smiling as I peeled the CD off my locker and flipped it open. He had scribbled music notes and wrote *JAZZ and BLUES* in big block letters on the front of the disc. A small sticky note with cramped tiny writing on it was attached to the inside cover. I giggled as I read it to myself.

"What's it say? I can't see! Zoe move over!" Laurel whined.

"The song titles should pop up when you put it on iTunes for your iPod. I would've printed them out but I was up late and didn't want to get yelled at if they heard my printer going." I giggled as I read it out loud. At the corner of my eye I saw Sacha whipping her straight brown hair out of her eyes and glaring at me as she snapped her locker closed. I chalked it up to a bad morning and focused my attention back onto Laurel who ripped the sticky note from my fingers to read it for herself. She suddenly frowned.

"It doesn't sound very romantic, does it?" Laurel scowled.

"Romantic? It's not a wedding ring or something," Zoe scowled at Laurel. "Sheesh."

"Yeah, but it's . . . well, it's bland, isn't it?" Laurel turned the sticky over as if there'd be some secret message of gooey gushiness on the back meant for my eyes only.

"Well, he didn't have to burn me one in the first place," I tried to sound convincing.

"Yeah, maybe," Laurel admitted. "And he's assuming you have iTunes and an iPod."

I burped out a little laugh despite how defensive I began to feel, "But I do have them."

"Well, the caring type of person would've asked you beforehand."

"Okay, time to shush now Laurel," Zoe stepped in, knowing that I'd very quickly become angry at Laurel when my scowl started to become permanent. Without a word, I whipped the sticky from Laurel's hand, slapped it back onto the CD, shoved everything into my bag, and walked quickly to English by myself.

I ignored Laurel for the rest of the morning. I decided that grunting to her persistent questions and attempts at talking with me would be an effective way at showing that I was angry with her. At lunchtime, when she bought me a brownie with pecans in it, I gave her a half smile and patted the chair next to me as we sat down at our regular table.

"Eep!" she exclaimed happily and instantly cheered up just before she got this sheepish look on her pink complexion. "Sorry about before. I think I was just being jealous."

"Thanks," I said and started peeling back the plastic wrap on the brownie. Okay, I confess, I'm a sucker for chocolate. I didn't want to tell her that we were okay. I wasn't even sure that I completely forgave her yet, but I wanted to make her sweat some more and make her learn a lesson.

The rest of the day went as usual, with the exception that Erik didn't seem to say anything else much to me but to ask if I got the CD and give me a wink. That's how I occupied much of my time at school: thinking about that CD and Erik. Why would he even wink at me though if he weren't interested? Maybe he's just a complete flirt. Yes, I've decided that he was just a flirt. Maybe. Okay, I really have no clue. I guess I'll just wait and see if he does something else, if anything.

Lauren and Zoe and I, with our allowances, treated ourselves to some coffee and teas from our favourite coffee shop. With my usual "London Fog" drink in hand—earl grey tea, steamed milk, some vanilla flavouring—we hung out at a table near the fireplace and chatted mostly about boys and clothes and movies and gossip from our classes—oh, and teasing from the girls about the CD Erik had given me.

That night, while I played the Jazz and Blues CD from Erik as I lay in bed, I thought about what Laurel had said earlier. Maybe she was right. But I decided to cling on to some hope and just wait a while and see what else Erik would do . . . if anything.



Late September

I took my time on my way to school one morning, leaving the house a little early so that I could enjoy this morning. It just felt better today. The air, the wind, the cool ground, the fallen leaves, they all smelled wonderful and crisp. I turned my head to the length of park that ran along the river towards the school when I thought I heard some kind of howl. I chalked it up to some kids yelling loudly in the student parking lot. It seemed like someone was always getting into a fight in there.

Lost in my little daydreams, I didn't hear the footsteps approach me from behind.

"You know you're not good enough for him," a snide and growling voice spoke up. I turned, frowning, to see Sacha and her cohort Carol sliding up the sidewalk. Dressed in punk-Goth clothes, black messy eyeliner, and spiked jewelry, they frightened me—almost. But this isn't to say that everyone who dresses like that is like Sacha and Carol. These two just happen to dress like that.

"I'm sure I'm good enough for anybody I choose," I retorted lamely.

Snorting, Sacha waved her hand at me, her spiked bracelet catching the light, threatening to come and slash my face. "Well Erik is too good for you. Who could like a squaw anyway? You're useless and you're not even a real Indian because you don't even live in the bush and kill moose and deer and smear their blood on your face."

It wasn't just the words, but the utter hate and disgust in her voice that made any response from me impossible. I froze in shock. My feet were firmly planted on the pavement. I was an immovable tree. After a few long moments I recovered. I moved. My legs suddenly felt heavy. It felt like I was trying to wade through a strong current of water or that I was trudging through deep snow with snow boots on. I finally brushed passed her and walked to school. So many questions raced through my mind. Why didn't I say anything? Was this racism? Was this what it was like to have someone say racist things at you? Was this what it was like to have someone hate you and not know you? It was hard for me to process. I wanted to cry. I was really near crying. My throat stung and I blinked quickly so the tears that started to fill my eyes didn't fall down my face and mess up my mascara.

As I was walking across the school field, I saw Zoe walking up the other path towards the school doors. I ran to her. I ran and I felt my legs betraying my need to be near her. Zoe was strong. She'd help me feel stronger. I knew it.

I grabbed her packsack, nearly forcing her to jolt backward. She whipped around quickly, the expression changing from near anger at being grabbed at, to surprise when she saw my face.

"What's wrong?" she asked me, taking my arm and leading me into the school.

"I . . . Sacha and Carol . . . I don't even know . . ." I stammered, trying not to cry, and honestly I still was not quite able to understand what just happened. I said nothing else as she pulled me down the hallway past our lockers, motioning to Laurel to join us as we passed her, and headed to the girls' bathroom. A couple of grade nines were prodding at their makeup when Zoe growled at them to get out. They scampered away like a couple of rabbits evading a fox. Sometimes you had to just love her forcefulness.

"What the heck's going on?" Laurel asked. Her voice was tense and worried. Both she and Zoe stared at me, silently willing me to talk.

"On my way to school . . . Sacha and Carol . . . well, it was Sacha who said it. She called me a useless squaw and that I wasn't an *Indian* because I didn't live in the bush and smear animal blood on my face!" I blurted it out, rushing through the words so I wouldn't start blubbing. I didn't want to look up at my friends. I stared at the brown tiles of the bathroom floor instead. "It was so . . . mean. So . . . almost evil . . . she even said I wasn't good enough for Erik." Well, now I was crying. My throat burned from holding it back for so long. I sobbed into my sleeve and immediately felt Laurel crush against me in a fierce hug. It seemed to make my crying worse, knowing that I was right in how I felt.

"Oh my god," Laurel whispered. "She's full of shit."

"I'm gonna kill her," Zoe hissed.

"Well you can't kill her literally," Laurel's logic interrupted. "But oh my god we need to tell someone. The principal. That just isn't right. At all."

"Of course I'm not gonna kill her. Sheesh. But, the bitch is gonna get it," Zoe added again, her hands were in such hard fists that her fingers and knuckles were white.

I knew I felt something of the same from Zoe. I had a sudden image of my hand turning into a white-knuckled fist and punching Sacha in the nose; watching as rich-red blood spilled from her nostrils and drip down onto the front of her black jacket; watching as she clutched at her face; watching as I saw the obvious pain that was there on her face. My emotional pain was blossoming into something else: something like raging anger and something vengeful. But I knew I would never do any of those things. It just wasn't in me to punch someone so violently. I turned inwards and knew that I was furious and upset and unnerved. I felt like crying, no matter which of those emotions I was feeling more. I couldn't get a solid grasp on her words and what they really meant and how they really affected me.

I felt my world shift with those words.

I felt something in me change.



A few minutes later, we three were sitting in the principal's office waiting for Mr. Bianci. The secretary, Mrs. Larson, eyed us from around her computer as she typed away at whatever. I looked around at his office. I'd never been inside it before. He had photos of his family neatly placed beside each other in the centre of his floor-to-ceiling bookshelf. Each photo was taken in front of some Italian sculpture or building, just like the ones I'd seen on TV. There were a lot of books on the shelves, a lot of which looked pretty old, from when he was in University, I supposed. I noticed he had a lot of books with Italian titles, none of which I understood. In one corner, he had those beige filing cabinets, each with labels in neat, small print on a card that had been slipped behind a framed front. A tall, leafy plant rested behind his desk in front of the window—there wasn't a bit of dust on the leaves, from what I could see from ten feet away anyway. The door whooshed open from behind us and we all turned around to look.

Mr. Bianci walked behind us and smiled, "Hi, girls." He sat in his chair and leaned back, crossing his fingers together. "Mrs. Larson says it was urgent that you see me, but you didn't want to tell her what it was about?"

I stared at Mr. Bianci's striped tie. The stripes were embroidered with a thicker and shinier fabric. It looked expensive. I figured he probably got his ties from Italy when he visited there. "Do you visit Italy often?" The question stumbled out of my mouth. I was curious actually, but I was also trying to delay talking about what had happened with Sacha.

"Yes, every year. I have family who live there," Mr. Bianci didn't seem fazed by my random question and he smiled. He leaned slightly forward in his chair.

"Do you buy your ties there? They're really nice," I added.

He chuckled and it made me feel a bit more at ease, "I do. But that's not what you girls are here for. So, tell me what's happened."

I clammed up and when a few seconds went by, Zoe blurted it out for me.

"That bitch Sacha and her little crony Carol went all crazy racist on Butter," she rushed, gripping the wooden chair arms, restraining herself from yelling. Mr. Bianci's pen drooped in his hand. He called in the vice principal Mrs. Eddleton. It was like facing a . . . I didn't know actually, but it definitely wasn't something that I liked or that made me feel comfortable. I felt scrutinized.

We then went though over an hour of talking about my relationship with Sacha and Carol. If I had done anything or something to them to instigate what had happened; if Laurel or Zoe had done anything. But, other than ignoring her or, excluding her from conversations with my friends, I didn't think I'd done anything to deserve something so nasty. As we all talked, the Principal would ask me if everything was correct or that if we told it the way it had happened and he'd make notes. In between my giant, breath-catching sobs, Laurel and Zoe filled in what they could. But, mostly I nodded when I cried too much to want to speak between sobbing. My nose became so stuffed I couldn't breathe through it anymore. I knew my eyes were also puffy and red.

When he finished writing down his notes, he walked over and stood near my shoulder. "I'm going to talk with Sacha and Carol. I'll talk to you in a couple of days and let you know what's going to happen. Okay?"

We all stood up and he started to lead us out of his office. "I'd like you to talk with your parents about this. I'm going to call your parents tomorrow and let them know what's been happening." I nodded, still too stuffy and puffy eyed and near sobbing again to want to speak.

We sat on the windowsills across from the office. Zoe and Laurel were talking quietly to each other. I tuned it all out and stared out of the window. As it was cold outside, there weren't any students in the courtyard like you'd see in the spring and early summer. I watched as an orange leaf fluttered around the courtyard then landed on the ground by a small flowerless bush. There was a vacant bench next to that little bush. I wished that I could be there now.



The woods.

A raven.

I was dressed in black from head to toe. Black hat. Black dress. Black gloves. Black stockings. Black shoes.

But my dress was made of feathers. Black and shaped like the raven's.

The raven stared at me.

In a few slow swoops it flew away.

"When the moon of the birds' eggs comes, the Cree people say a hard-blowing wind will bring the animals out of their hiding places in the forests. This is a very good time to go hunting"
(from *When the South Wind Blows* by Ray & Stevens, p. 132).

Chapter 3

Confusion and Clarity

Giiwashkweyendam dush Wahsayabe

He was in the woods by that park, standing amongst the trees that lined the boundary of the park and the woods that spilled into the vastness of forest and all of that which hadn't been plowed over or houses built on. His back was to me, but I knew it was him.

"Hello!" I called out to him and I waited. He didn't seem to hear me. I called again. Still nothing. Oh! "Boozhoo!" I called to him again, in Ojibwe.

He turned then and faced me. A sudden comprehension seeped into his eyes. He gave a small smile; it was almost feral, but more mischievous. Then, he turned away again and melted behind a large tree. I walked forward, closer and closer and crept beside the tree. I peered around and was not completely surprised to find him gone.

Slight movements at the ground made me look down. The tip of what looked like a snake disappeared underneath some small ferns.



"Hi," I blushed, pretending not to stare at the shine in his hair, below the rim of his hat, how it had that slight mussed look even without putting product in his hair. Erik. I closed the door to my locker, hiding the pictures of my favourite—and I should mention cute—actors from Erik. I hadn't seen him since the day before, before Sacha and Carol . . .

"So," he paused, pretending not to notice that I was trying not to stare at him. "Me and some of my friends are going to the show tonight, did you want to come with . . . like . . . um—"

I smiled and could feel my face become hot; I bet it was a bright red already. *A date? A date!* I looked down and stared at his shoes for a couple of seconds. One of the laces on his sixties retro-looking shoes was undone and the strands were trailing over the sides of his foot and lying, almost gracefully, on the floor.

"Yeah . . . um . . . it starts at seven. Did you want me to pick you up? My Mom said I could borrow her car," he said, nervously picking at his backpack strap on the front of his shoulder.

"I can meet you there but, if you could drive me back home that'd be cool," I said, still smiling but not quite meeting his eyes. "Oh, would you mind if I invited Laurel and Zoe too?"

"Invite away," Erik smiled that brilliant smile again. "A couple of my buddies are coming too." He tipped his fedora hat to me then sauntered down the hallway.

A poke in the shoulder made me turn around quickly. Laurel was grinning, hugely. Zoe stood beside her, rolling her eyes, but smiling.

"Did Erik just ask you out on a date??" she squealed. "Oh my god!!"

"He asked me to the show. You and Zoe are coming too," I smiled. "A couple of his friends are going to be there too."

"Ohh, I wonder what I'm going to wear! Maybe that silver sequin skirt with the--" Laurel's grin ended suddenly, just as a loud metal slam came from the end of the hallway. She was staring over my shoulder. I turned. It was Sacha and Carol. The scene didn't register very quickly, until I noticed all of the people surrounding them. They were being escorted out of the school with their parents and the principal and vice-principal, all surrounding them. We watched as they disappeared around the corner.

"They probably got suspended," Zoe sighed. "I heard they were having a meeting with Mr. Bianci today. Well, they better have been suspended after what they said to you."

"I don't feel sorry for them, that's for sure," Laurel offered. "And neither should you!" She took my hand and kissed it. I laughed loudly.

"My, my, thank you good madam," I laughed.

"No problem," Laurel giggled. "At least I didn't bite my thumb at you!"

Zoe's chuckle drew our gaze toward her. "You two and Shakespeare, who knew?"

"Blame Mrs. Deeley and making us watch both an old and a new version of *Romeo and Juliet*," Laurel smiled.

I took another glance down the hallway and I saw Mr. Bianci and Mrs. Eddleton signal at me to come to them. I brought Laurel and Zoe in tow and when we caught up, they led us back to their offices.

"Perhaps Miss Evans and Miss Carter would like to wait outside?" Mrs. Eddleton asked, looking at Laurel and Zoe respectively.

I looked at my best friends, suddenly not wanting to be without them. Ever. "Um . . . I'm just going to tell them anyway. Can they please stay?"

Mr. Bianci nodded. "That's fine. Seeing as they were the ones to come with you when you reported Sacha and Carol's behaviour."

"We saw them being escorted out of the school," Zoe said.

"Yes," Mrs. Eddleton confirmed. "Miss Belanov and Miss Kolanko, Sacha and Carol, have been suspended for five school days. When they come back Sacha will have to formally apologize to you and both will be attending cultural sensitivity discussions once a week for the rest of the semester with Elder Isaac Aazhawagaazii and our school counsellor."

"Thanks," I smiled a little, a semi-fake smile. I think a part of me was kind of hoping they'd be expelled, but knowing that they had to come back and apologize and that they'd have to take those classes, that was good too. I was happy that they were going to be talking with Elder Isaac. He was at our high school last year too. He was really nice and when you talked to him, he really listened. Last year he held sweats during the winter months and throughout the year he had offered drumming and drum teachings to all students. A lot of the First Nations students in the school hung out with him on a daily basis. He had an office in the school, but a lot of the time he could be seen around the school and just talking with students. Last year he was in the lobby for a couple of hours each day for a few weeks making snowshoes with some students. That was cool to see. I didn't participate in that though. It felt like everyone would stare as they walked by.

I hoped that Sacha and Carol felt really badly about what they did, but who knows, maybe they just didn't care. I know, I'm angry. I wished that I could say that I wanted them to hurt like I did, but that wouldn't make anything better. It wouldn't make me feel better either. Hurting like I did . . . I hoped no one else has had to feel like that.



When I got home after school my Mom and Dad were waiting for me in the living room. I couldn't look at them in the eyes. We talked for almost an hour about what had happened at school. Then we got to the part about why I didn't tell them right away and I could only say,

"I don't know why," I said honestly. "It just stunned me. I wasn't really thinking straight. I didn't know how to handle it."

"Well, now you know, next time—although we hope there isn't a next time—come to us right away and we can sort it out with you, okay," Dad said to me while my Mom hugged me. My throat started to burn; I tried to clear it a few times, as if that would help much.

"I'm making chicken dumplings for supper, your favourite," my Mom smiled at me. I couldn't help but smile then. My Mom knew that even the little things could make me feel so much better.



Zoe, the only one with a car, picked me up at my house a while after my supper of yummy and hot chicken and dumplings. Laurel, in her silver sequin mini skirt and a peach coloured top, looked absolutely beautiful. Even though she was a bit chunky, you could not say that she was not beautiful. She had opted for putting in contacts tonight; "It's a refreshing change," she had said when I mentioned the lack of glasses. She had even straightened her long, blonde hair. Zoe, in a nice looking pair of jeans that made her butt look good, although she'd never admit it and would shrug it off and say that it was just a pair of jeans, had a leather top on which was snug fitting and had no straps. Her boobs were small so she didn't need a bra, and she didn't really wear one all the time anyway. Laurel and I had to—we didn't really have a choice with that one.

We found a parking spot at the theatre, right over a huge rain puddle. Apparently everyone but Zoe saw it. Her loud swearing echoed off the walls of the mall and back to us.

"Always me," she groaned. "I just got these before school too." She opened the trunk and rummaged in the mass of junk collected there. Pulling out a pair of flip-flops, she smirked, "I'm like McGuyver."

I howled. "I love that show!!"

"Mc-who?" Laurel asked. "Wow, you guys gotta stop watching that retro channel."

"I had a talk with my parents after school," I suddenly announced. "The principal already let them know what happened."

Fighting against a strong south wind, we tidied our hair in the car windows before we headed into the theatre. That's when I saw them, in the reflection of the car window. There were two girls, about my age, standing at the side of the parking lot by a cluster of trees that bordered the edge of the river. I looked at Zoe and Laurel. They were primping, both of them, surprisingly. I turned back to watch the two girls by the trees, straining to hear their voices as they pointed at the sky.

"I want the small bright star," the one with the long hair said. The second, with shorter hair, and obviously a little older, pointed at another star in the sky nearby to the bright one. The second star was bigger and gave off a red aura—but, it was not the planet Jupiter.

"Then I'll have the larger one," the older one said. "He'll be better to make love with."

"Eee," the younger one laughed. "We'll see."

I giggled and turned to Zoe and Laurel. I started to tell them about the two girls and thumbed to the area of trees behind me. When they gave me a confused look, I turned around, the girls were gone. I assumed they had dashed onto the nearby bridge beyond the cluster of trees.

When we were inside the theatre doors, we saw them all right away. Erik stood near the game area, with another one of his cool hats on, and three of his friends were shouting at each other while they played air hockey. Dillon and a couple of other boys that were in some of my classes were also there. Dillon was in our English class. He sat behind Laurel. I had noticed that he often stared at the back of her golden head. Tonight, Dillon couldn't keep his eyes off of Laurel. He constantly looked her way. He seemed to be entranced. It was probably a good thing Laurel wore her sparkly skirt.

One of the boys, who was a bit taller than the rest, jabbed Dillon when he stared at Laurel for too long. Dillon's face went red and he made a conscious effort to stare at anything else. It seemed that everybody but Laurel knew that Dillon liked her. Laurel, as smart as she was, could be completely oblivious sometimes.

Erik turned and saw us, waving us down. "Hey!" His smile was what you'd call radiant. I knew I was blushing. Then, I knew everyone could see I was blushing when Laurel suddenly tickled my shoulder.

"Hi, hope we're not late for the movie," I smiled. I think I actually sounded chipper.

"Nah," Erik said. "Lots of time. Oh, hey, this is Nick and Tristan." Nick was well-built, with shaggy black hair that had a lot of product in it. Tristan was leaner, muscular, and a bit taller than Erik, with light brown hair. His eyes smiled even when his mouth didn't. I liked that, I think.

After we bought the tickets, pop, and popcorn, we all settled into the theatre seats, awaiting the romantic vampire movie based on the books I pored over in my bedroom, often during the night with a flashlight under the sheets so my Mom wouldn't see the light coming from my room and stop me from reading. I ended up sitting near the end with Tristan on my left and Zoe on my right, since she loved the aisle seats. I was a little put off that Erik was way on the other end beside Laurel.

Tristan was sniffing through the movie until about halfway through when he became fed up. "Does anyone have tissue or napkins or something? This is driving me nuts!"

We all laughed.

"I don't have a napkin, but I have a plastic bag," I announced, pulling it out from my purse and removing the peach from it. After a strange look from Tristan, I answered him. "It's so I don't get peach juice on everything if it gets squished."

He laughed and promptly blew his nose into the bag several loud times until he breathed in dramatically through his nose and gave me a wide grin. Everyone was giggling quietly—well, as quietly as we could in a theatre.

As the movie ended, Tristan and I chatted a little about the scenes we liked best. Apparently he had read the book too—to better critique the movie as it was based on a book. Or so he said. I think he just secretly liked the stories like I did. I was distracted slightly by the way his short curls wove around the bottom of his ear lobe, daring me to twist my finger around them. Tristan and I hung back a little as the rest of the group moved forward out of the theatre.

When Tristan paused longer to look at me, his mouth open in mid-thought, he leaned in to me, his chest lightly brushing my shoulder. He whispered. His voice was gentle.

"He doesn't like you like that," Tristan whispered slowly, he sounded very sincere. "He wanted to get closer to Laurel. He was just being shy."

I stared at him, stunned, watching his face for any kind of meanness or insincerity. There was nothing there but worry and kindness. "I, um, well. Thanks for telling me, I guess." I don't think I've been more embarrassed. Was my crushing really that obvious? I think it probably was. I moved forward down the stairs.

"He just thinks you're nice. Not that you're into him," Tristan went on explaining as he followed behind me. "Sorry."

I heard an unintelligible whisper from him as I walked a little faster out of the theatre doors and met the rest of the group huddled in the middle of the large hallway.

"Hey guess what," Zoe said. "Nick is Val's younger brother!"

"No way," I smiled. "Well, I guess I'll be seeing you around more then, huh." I assumed he'd be hanging around his brother still, even though Val was buddying up with Ettie lately. Saagaate and Paul, who was Val's best friend, were hanging around the house every day last week and the whole weekend too. But I didn't hang out with them. I could feel someone staring at me and when I looked over, I saw Tristan quickly look away. I hope I didn't make him feel bad about telling me that particular bit of news. He was only the messenger—as they say.

After some cheery goodbyes and see you later we got into our cars and headed home.



The woods again. I inhaled deeply. The scents around me were intense. Stronger than I have noticed before. But different. Somewhere else. He was here. Somewhere. The sun was setting, but maybe it was rising. The sky was reds and oranges, light purples and blues. A skittering in the bush. A soft crunch a few meters away. I looked to the side.

A wolf.

Grey, white, russet browns. Soft yellow eyes focused on nothing else but me. Yet I didn't feel that I was in any danger. It turned to move away, but then turned back to look at me, silently telling me to follow him.

I followed the wolf to a small clearing. In the center near a stump, the ground seemed to be writhing, moving and vibrating. I walked closer. The ground around the stump was a mass of snakes, moving, slithering, and gliding over each other in a random, constant motion. I opened my mouth to scream.



The beginning of the school week was going by quietly enough for me until Wednesday when someone was sitting in the stool in Science where Zoe usually sat.

Tristan.

Zoe was over in Tristan's seat near the back of the class, grinning at me, laughing through her teeth.

Really?

I slid awkwardly onto my usual stool and took a look at Tristan who was gripped in silent laughter.

"Laughing at me?" I asked, debating whether or not to be angry or annoyed or even slightly amused.

"Not really," Tristan smiled. "It's just nice to see you look so surprised."

"Why's that nice?" I asked, not feeling angry or annoyed, but slightly interested and amused.

Tristan smiled and shrugged then opened his textbook. He obviously wanted to end our little talk. I took out my binder and textbook too, trying to look distracted enough not to look at him again.

When class ended I waited for Zoe who was chatting brightly with her new seatmate, Cala. I never really talked to Cala all that much, but she seemed, a little flighty, but nice. Her thin frame was toned and you could tell she was strong. I thought that she might be in gymnastics or ballet, something that made you literally use all of your muscles.

When Zoe finally left the classroom, I was waiting for her in the hallway.

"Okay, what was that about?" I stuck my tongue out at her. Zoe chuckled quietly then steered me towards our next class.

"What's 'what' about?" Zoe frowned.

"Switching seats with Tristan," I offered.

"Hey, it was a win-win situation," she chortled. "Don't tell me you weren't ultimately happy about it?"

"Win-win? What do you mean? Me and Tristan?" I never really thought of him like that. I barely knew him. I told Zoe that much. She rolled her eyes at me.

"Wow, you're slow sometimes," Zoe laughed at me. I laughed, but couldn't help but wonder if I missed something she was trying to tell me.

"What'd I miss?" I asked.

"Lots," she smirked. "Come on, let's catch up with Laurel before the next class, I've got some info for her."

The info had to do with Zoe making fun of me.

"She's totally in her own little planet sometimes," Zoe was laughing.

Laurel, laughing so hard, sputtered through her gasps of air, "I'm gonna pee myself."

"Oh sheesh, guys, enough," I couldn't help but laugh. They were contagious. A light swipe of my hair on my back made me turn around then. It was Ettie and Saagaate.

"Hey," Ettie smiled. "What's so funny?"

"She's had a bit of a dense moment, don't mind her," Laurel giggled.

"Oh whatever," I stuck my tongue out at Laurel then turned back to Ettie. "What's going on?"

Ettie and Saagaate shared a conspiratorial look and I was prepared for some bit of mischievousness. "Well, we want to go to the Falls this Saturday, but I have to babysit Ish and Saagaate has to take care of Wolf while Auntie's working overtime at the hospital."

"Okay . . . ? Babysitting wasn't really on my list of things to do, and I've covered for you lots during the summer," I pointed out, but still willing to listen.

"We thought you might just want to come with us," Saagaate jumped in. I was surprised at first. Usually those two never invited me out with them. "We want to bring Paul and Val, and thought you could distract the boys and play games with them?"

"Ah, I see," I shook my head. After half a minute of deciding whether or not to help them out, I gave in and agreed. "Okay, but next two times Mom and Dad want me to babysit, you're gonna do it, 'kay?"

Ettie shared a look at Saagaate who nodded. "Deal," Ettie smiled. "We want to head out before ten, sound good?"

"Yeah, that's fine," I nodded. "I'll see you at home after school," Ettie and Saagaate skipped off down the hallway towards their next class.

"Aww, aren't you nice," Zoe teased.

"Meh, I don't really mind. It'll actually be kind of cool watching Ettie on a date with a guy. That'll sure be something to see," I giggled. After switching textbooks for the last class I had the misfortune—secretly, not really—of reminding myself that Tristan was in my last class too. Oh joy.



"Auntie Cynthia, Wolf, Saagaate, Cocom and Grandpa Benny are coming here for Thanksgiving. They'll be here Wednesday night," Dad reminded us with a big smile during dinner that night. Mom nodded, confirming to Ish when he insisted on having the answer again. "Oh, and don't forget that we're going moose hunting Thursday morning right after breakfast. Mom already called your schools and let them know that you won't be there for Thursday and Friday this week."

My parents would often go hunting for game when Cocom and Benny came into town. I had killed partridge and rabbit before with Mom and Dad, but I've never gone hunting for game with them and Cocom and Grandpa Benny. I have never seen a moose get shot. It made me uneasy to think about it. I didn't think I could ever shoot a moose. But I was excited about flying on a bush plane to our family's traditional hunting area and staying in the wood cabin out there. We'd have to drive a couple of hours to a small town outside the city and catch the bush plane, which would be a half hour flight, from there.

"You're coming?" Mom asked. I swear she was psychic.

"I don't think I could shoot at a moose, but I'll come and help out," I answered. Mom smiled. I knew it would make her happy if I came.

"You can help Cocom carry her things. She says her hip has been sore lately," Mom continued. I nodded.

"You can help me out too," Dad nodded at Ish.

"I can carry your gun?" Ish grinned.

"You can carry the sandwiches," Dad laughed.

"Sandwiches?!" Ish squeaked through the open frown on his face.

"Yep," Dad teased. "But I'll show you how to shoot if you carry them."

"Yeah!" Ish whooped.

Dad returned to the newspaper, smiling. His pencil flew over the page as he worked on the daily crossword. Dad was really good at crosswords. He was a walking dictionary.

I looked at Ettie. "Are you coming?"

She shook her head. "I've got homework to do. Besides, who's going to look after the fur ball?" I knew it was an easy excuse—having homework to do. Ettie really wasn't a fan of going hunting for moose. But Ralphie did need to be walked every day.

After dinner I went to my bedroom and cleaned up. I did a thorough cleaning. I vacuumed the carpet, I wiped the windows, I dusted every surface and even my ceiling fan blades, and I cleaned out my closet and desk. After a couple of hours I was sweaty again and decided to take a quick shower to clean the sweat and dust from my skin and hair. I spent the rest of the night lounging and reading a post-apocalyptic-zombie-invasion book—it was the second in a trilogy I had gotten in the summer. I also spent some time on Facebook, playing silly games to waste time and posted a status that said "Zombies, zombies, everywhere, and not a cute guy in sight." That post received some "likes" and comments about zombies in general and some remarks about a few guys at school.

I fell asleep with a silly grin on my face.

"The mystery of all endings is found in the birth of new beginnings . . . The human capacity to develop is infinite" (Lane et al., 1985, p. 71).

Chapter 4

Loss

Nibo

I was in the middle of the forest. The forest. I could see him up ahead, crouching, and staring at something. His head moved from side to side, studying something on the ground, something small. I suddenly found myself standing next to him, the feral looking man, whatever he was. He spoke to me in Ojibwe, but I understood it in English.

"It is dead," he said.

I nodded. It was a baby duckling, yellow and still fluffy. "How did it die?"

"It died," he said in the same quiet, mellow tone. "All things die. All things come to a circle."

"Come to a circle?" I asked, not sure what he meant. I felt my mind working so slowly.

He moved his arm to the side, over a patch of grassless ground. He drew a circle, slowly, pointedly, in the soil.

I knew what he meant then. The medicine wheel. The circle. The cycle of life and death, of rebirth in many ways, in different ways, of everything coming back to you.

Of wholeness.

Of completeness.

Of balance.

In his squatting position, he turned his head toward my face. His look was intent, knowing, curious, happy, and something of a completely different topic than the circle and the duck.

"Your secret," he finally said.

"My secret?" I didn't know what he meant. He smiled then, a half smile, teasing, knowing, mischievous. I was wary of him. I didn't trust him.

He stood up so suddenly I skittered back a step. He pointed his finger to the centre of my chest and smiled slowly again.

A loud moan in the distance shook me to the core, frightening me beyond anything I felt in this forest before. I looked around, expecting to see something come rushing from the trees towards me. But nothing did. And when I turned to speak to the man again, he was no longer

there. A fist sized stone, interspersed with patches of quartz and amethyst, lay on the ground where he had been standing.

I bent to pick it up.



I woke up from my dream, wiping a thin line of drool from my chin. "So attractive," I groaned. I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed and sat there for a couple of minutes. It was dark outside. It was five-thirty in the morning.

The dream had already started to slip away from my memory. I remembered only bits of it and knew that by noon most of it would be forgotten. Except for the circle. The circle I knew I would never forget. How it was drawn into the soil. How the dirt was pushed into parallel ridges as the circle was drawn. I grabbed a pencil from my school bag and drew a circle into a pad of paper. The meaning of it tugged at my memory. I could feel it there, willing it to be remembered fully.

After quickly showering and dressing, I put on my amethyst crystal pendant necklace and skipped down the stairs for an early Thursday morning breakfast. It was a smorgasbord of breakfast foods: eggs, bacon, bannock, hash browns, crepes, fresh fruit, and sausage. The house was loud: yelling and laughing and the sounds of lots of people moving about. Ralphie paced around the kitchen table, gulping up bits of food that people snuck down to him.

"Oh hey," Ettie chirped. "Don't forget about Sunday, Frisbee and lunch at the Falls."

I smiled. Doing anything with Ettie lately was rare, so I jumped at the chance.

"I'm so pumped, I'm going to bring Keegan. Wolf and Saagaate are coming too, right?" Ish jumped in his seat, cereal flying from his mouth.

"Yeah, they're coming," Ettie's cheeks grew redder, her tone changing, higher pitched, lighter. "And a couple more people."

I smiled. I had an idea who might be coming along, but didn't want to say with Mom and Dad around us. Embarrassing Ettie wouldn't bode well for me.

Everyone, even Ettie and Saagaate who weren't going, prepared for the day of hunting. Guns were looked over from their cleaning and oiling the night before. Ammo was accounted for. Knives, canvas, bags, and cleaning rags were packed. Sandwiches, snacks, thermoses of coffee, and hot chocolate were made. Canned veggies and food to last for a couple of days were also packed for the eight of us. In a last scramble, Dad went searching for his hunting licence. Our family's traditional hunting lands were in our traditional home and treaty territory—only Dad had needed to get a hunting license. The rest of us just had to bring our Status cards.

When the minivan was packed, Dad and Grandpa Benny hooked up the utility trailer, optimistic that we would indeed find and shoot a moose. Then the seven of us dressed, with packsacks, bags of extra clothes, toiletries, our hunting attire, and launched ourselves excitedly into the minivan.

We drove for a couple of hours to that little town outside of the city. The leaves had all turned orange by this time and were starting to fall off the trees. The trees were all oranges and golds and yellows. They were the colours of a sunrise.

About an hour into the trip, Ish pointed at something on the highway in front of us.

"Slow down, Dad!" Ish yelled.

"Slowing down won't do much of anything if the partridge doesn't move," Dad said.

"Yeah, I doubt it'll move, Ish," I said. "They aren't the smartest things."

Dad slowed the van, but the partridge was indeed not smart enough to move from the middle of the road. We heard a slight thud and Ish, Wolf and I turned around to face the back of the van and we saw a plume of feathers explode from under the trailer and scatter around in the wind and on the highway behind us.

"Can't we go and get it?" Wolf asked me.

"There probably isn't much left of it, Wolfie," I answered.

"Sucks," he responded. "Partridge taste good."

I chuckled. "I'm sure we'll be able to find some during the trip."

At the bush plane outfitters, we parked and got all of our gear and the guns out and hauled everything to the bush plane called an Otter. I watched through the little window beside my seat as the plane lifted from the water and as the trees began to look further away. The trees looked like fields of yellows and oranges and gold—like fields of dandelions and flowers. I watched through the window and saw the shadow of our plane move over lakes, trees and rocks. The engine was loud. The thrumming moved into everything, my seat, the floor, the walls, and I could feel the vibration move into my chest. I had brought earplugs but they didn't do much to drown out the noise of the engine and the propellers.

At the end of the half hour flight, the plane started to circle the lake of our traditional home. We landed, the water skis spraying water behind us, and the plane glided to the dock. As we unloaded everything from the plane, my parents reminding the pilot that we'd be leaving the next day in the late afternoon, we brought everything to the large kitchen-dining-living space building that sat facing the dock up the beach and on a grassy area.

Mom and Auntie set about putting everything in the fridge and getting a brunch ready for everyone. Dad had turned the generator on which sat behind the building.

Ish and Wolf moved their bags into a small two-person cabin that sat with a few others next to a rather large log cabin where the parents and grandparents would be staying. I took a small cabin to myself; it was nestled between Ish and Wolf's cabin and the large log cabin.

After settling in and waiting for brunch to be ready, I walked with Dad down the beach. We saw some old bear and wolf tracks high up on the beach near the brush-line. There weren't

any moose tracks here. We double backed and walked along the beach that bent and curved around the bay. It was here that Dad and I saw fresh moose tracks.

After brunch, we all got our hunting gear ready and our hunting clothes on and set to following those moose tracks around the curve of the bay. Grandpa Benny took a moment to say some words, a prayer. When he finished, he laid tobacco down on the ground. Ish was already at his side asking him what he was doing. Grandpa Benny explained to Ish and Wolf, who, also curious, had come up beside Ish. Benny explained that saying a prayer to Gitche Manitou and putting down some tobacco on the ground was to ask for a successful hunt.

We walked for about half an hour when Grandpa Benny paused to look at some tracks in the soggy ground. He kneeled down and gathered Ish and Wolf next to him.

"See those?" Benny asked the boys. "Those are moose tracks. They're fresh. Only a couple of hours old."

"And there!" Benny gestured towards a small trail of tracks emerging from under some low-hanging branches.

"What is it?" Wolf asked, crouching near the little rabbit-travelled trail.

"Rabbit tracks. Those are the front paws, and those are the back feet of the rabbit," Benny explained as he gestured to the different rabbit tracks. "See over there? There's some rabbit scat near the trail."

"Ew," Ish wrinkled his nose. "But kinda cool."

"Animals don't like noise, you know?" Benny said more than asked in a hushed voice. "They like the quiet 'cause loud noises and talking and loud footsteps can spook 'em. And the birds. Them will see us and tell all the other animals that those humans or predators are near. You'll hear 'em chirp and whistle up a storm!"

"Predators," Ish said under his breath. "Like wolves, Grandpa?"

"Yes, like wolves," Benny smiled at Ish. "But don't worry about wolves here. There's too many of us and they avoid humans as much as they can anyways. They never were friendly to us like dogs are."

Benny chuckled to himself. "You know why dogs sniff each other's butts?"

Ish and Wolf laughed and asked why.

"Cause that Weesquachak liked playing tricks on animals and people way back when. And he tricked 'em dogs you see. He saw they were havin' a meeting. Back then, dogs would have meetings and would have their furs hangin' outside the wigwam, like we hang up our coats. See?" Grandpa Benny asked the boys, judging their interest in the story, and continued. "So Weesquachak saw they were havin' a meeting and switched up all their furs." Grandpa Benny leaned in, as if he were about to tell a fantastic secret. Ish and Wolf were giggling. "And then he ran into that meetin' of theirs and scared 'em all and they run out of the wigwam! But they were

in such a rush and scared, you see, that they just grabbed whatever fur they saw first! So now, them dogs sniff each other's butts 'cause they're trying to find their right furs!"

"What if Ralphie sniffs my butt?" Ish suddenly asked.

"Well, I don't think he thinks you're another dog, Ish," Grandpa Benny said. "Maybe you just have on some stinky underwear!"

"Hey!" Ish opposed, but his laugh betrayed his apparent seriousness. Grandpa loved to tease.

We continued on after that and walked for what felt like another hour. We walked in straight lines, we walked around trees and land too soggy to walk through, and we walked in wobbly and curvy lines until it felt like we were going to be walking in circles soon. That'd never really happen though. Grandpa Benny knows this part of the land like the back of his hand. His trapping cabin was in the same area.

After another short while, Cocom and Benny slowed their pace. There were some more moose tracks. Really fresh tracks, Grandpa Benny said.

Both Ish and Wolf nodded and became silent, looking around, I assumed, for any signs of a deer.

"What's that?" Mom suddenly and quietly interjected. She dropped her packsack and took out a slingshot and some little round metal BB's. She pocketed a bb into the pouch of the slingshot. She moved smoothly and silently off to the side of our route, slingshot aimed down her sights. I couldn't even hear her steps she was so quiet. She stood still, guided her arms to some unseen creature, and let go of the pouch holding the BB. The BB apparently flew, the rubber tubing recoiling and then it hung flaccidly, wobbling slightly.

I heard a slight *shwuck!*

She turned and smiled at us. "A bit of something extra for supper." She then crouched through the brush and returned quickly with a dead partridge. Auntie Cynthia helped Mom insert the dead bird into a re-sealable plastic bag then placed it inside an empty drawstring bag.

"Are you going to try and get a few more?" I whispered to Mom.

"Yeah, a few more would be nice. We can try getting some on the drive back to the city. We can have them with the turkey on Monday," she smiled. "I'll cook this one tonight."

"Yum," I smiled back at Mom and thought about cooked partridge for Thanksgiving Monday. Mom made partridge just taste so good. I pictured it cooked with baked sweet potatoes and turnips all dusted with cinnamon, nutmeg, and rosemary.

We walked a bit more until we came to a small river.

"It crossed here," Grandpa Benny said. "We'll have to come back tomorrow with the boats and look for the tracks."

All of the adults agreed.

On our way back to the cabins, Dad showed Ish how to shoot. Using a small game gun, Dad showed Ish how to hold it, how to aim, and how to pull the trigger. When Ish had finally shot a tree, he whooped.

Canned veggies, some fish caught from the lake, the partridge, and some freshly made bannock was our supper that night. Simply. Yummy. Filling. That's what hunting meals seemed to be like. It looked like repetition for all the adults. They all knew what to do without asking each other.

When I was curled up in bed in my little two-person cabin, I took out my book and flashlight and fell asleep reading.

Everyone had to wake up early the next morning. My phone alarm rang at 6 o'clock in the morning. It was all I could do not to press the snooze button continuously. I shuffled out of bed and dressed in yoga pants and a comfy tee with a juvenile pony cartoon on the front. I layered up in my hunting coat, which was really my mother's old one, put my waterproof boots on and left the little cabin. I woke the boys up and waited for them outside of the cabin door, as they both got dressed. I walked them to the main log cabin where my parents and Auntie and Cocom and Benny were already eating breakfast and drinking coffee.

I looked at the plates near the stove. The pancakes and bacon put a smile on my face. I dished out some for Ish, Wolf, and myself. We ate quickly and were out loading the boats up just as the sun was rising. Before we left in the boats Grandpa Benny made another prayer and tobacco offering, just as he had done yesterday.

We ran two boats slowly out into the bay, idling them then turning off the motors before we got too close. We paddled the boats along the shore until Grandpa Benny signaled for us to bring the boats onto the beach. We all got out and walked along the beach. Some distance later, Dad and Grandpa Benny separated and Dad walked to the other end of the bay. We all sat down on the beach and waited.

Grandpa Benny took a small pot from his sack and scooped up some lake water. Slowly, he poured it back into the lake.

"It's mimicking the sound of a female moose peeing in the lake," Mom whispered to Ish who had been tugging on her coat. Ish giggled quietly and was silenced when Cocom turned and stared at him.

Grandpa Benny waited for a little while then poured the water a second time. We all waited.

Crack.

It was so quiet. I thought I hadn't heard it.

Crack.

It was louder that time and everyone heard it.

We didn't wait very long after that when we saw the moose emerge from the trees. Its antlers were wide as it stood there for a moment. It turned and headed to the water and began to drink.

Bang!

Dad had fired his rifle. It was a clean shot, straight into the heart. That much I knew. It would be a quick death. The moose took a few short strides back towards the trees then fell. Dad came back and sat with the rest of us. He chatted quietly with Benny as the moose died just off in the bush. After a while, Grandpa Benny went over and indicated that its spirit was gone. He said a prayer of thanks to the moose and offered tobacco as well. He cut off the moose's bell and hung it on a branch where the moose had fallen, as was always and forever done by our family.

Cocom, Auntie Cynthia, and Mom went to the boats to take out the knives, canvas, cloth, bags of plastic, as well as a box of sandwiches for lunch and thermoses of coffee and hot cocoa.

The women of the family set to skinning the moose. We would use the entire animal. Cocom would turn the hide into traditional leather, mashing the moose's brains into hot water, and then soaked the scraped and cleaned animal skin in the mixture so that it would soften up. It would be stretched and smoked multiple times until it was ready to be made into moccasins and mitts or even a jacket that she would later add beaded designs to.

Cutting the meat cleanly, wrapping it up in cheesecloth to keep the flies away, then placing it on the boats took the entire morning. We stopped at noon to have some lunch, sandwiches and hot chocolate for the boys and me. After lunch we finished loading up the boats with the rest of our gear. The boat ride back to the beach was a welcomed rest for everyone.

All of us helped to carry the meat to picnic tables set up in front of the beach. Grandpa and Dad tied some cord between trees and we hung up the meat so that it would be kept clean. Mom and Auntie covered the meat again with cheesecloth. After all of this, suppertime was close. Cocom and Mom began to cook the heart, some meat and kidneys over the campfire. Auntie made some bannock and wild rice that had been soaked the night before. As we began to eat, Grandpa took a little bit from each organ, meat, and some of the bannock and wild rice, and put it on a little paper plate. This he put into the fire.

Dad had the first bite of the meal as the hunter who killed the moose. We took turns and told what we remembered most from the hunt as we shared the rest of the meat.

"The way it stood and looked around when it came out of the trees. It was meant to be," Cocom said.

"I remember hearing it first before we saw it," Auntie Cynthia said.

"For me, it was how Donal and I separated to cover both sides of the bay. I knew that your Dad would be the one to take the shot," Grandpa Benny smiled.

"The moose. How it just walked to the water. I remember that most," Ish said between chews or moose meat.

"I liked how it was drinking," Wolf said.

"Me too. I liked seeing it drinking from the lake. I have never seen that before," I said on my turn.

"It was like everything slowed down, when I was ready to take the shot. The moose was so still as it drank from the water. In that moment I knew that the kill was meant for me" Dad said.

"For me? It was the expression on your face just after you fired your rifle. You were happy in that moment, but a little sad too, I think," Mom was looking at Dad and smiling. She gave him a peck on the lips.

When Auntie Cynthia and Cocom had finished, they set to skinning the head and pulling the jaw out. The tongue was put in a pot of boiling water and the jaw was roasting on a rack over a campfire. The leg bones were cooking beside the fire on some hot ashes—I was excited to taste the marrow from the leg bones. That was my favourite part. The intestines were turned inside out and they were roasting on a stick beside the hot ashes; they'd be eaten with the meat because they were a fatty part of the moose.

Back in my little cabin to myself, I couldn't help but smile and enjoy the easiness of this day. It was hard work, but it felt really rewarding. I fell asleep easily that night: my little flashlight was left on as I read my zombie book. I woke up in the morning just after the sun rose and found my book on the floor. I had lost my page.

All of the moose that was hanging throughout the night was taken and put into coolers in the early morning. Dad used the satellite phone and called the air company to pick us up before lunch. We would feast tonight.

After breakfast, all of our gear was packed, the cabins were cleaned, and everything was placed at the dock ready to be loaded onto the plane. When the Otter plane landed, everything was loaded in a matter of minutes. I watched from the air as we left our family home. The lake, the bay, the trees, even our cabins became smaller and further away. When we landed at the outfitters, there was more unloading of the plane and loading of the trailer hooked at the back of the minivan.

On the highway, I was only vaguely aware of the minivan stopping for a short while and fully woke and turned around to look over the seat. I saw Mom open the hatch and place a bag into the back.

"Partridge?" I asked.

"You betcha'," Mom smiled.

I fell asleep again for the rest of the drive back to the city. Both Ish and Wolf were totally passed out in the chairs next to me. I could hear their soft snores as I drifted back to sleep thinking of partridge and yams and spices, and of moose meat with herbs and wild rice for Thanksgiving.



It was the morning of Thanksgiving Sunday. The day was going as planned. We all got the sandwiches and juice ready, and some lawn games and packed everything into the car including a couple of old blankets to sit on. The drive down the highway for the half hour to the falls went nicely: there wasn't much traffic, or a lot of wind, and it wasn't too cold. All of the leaves on the trees had fallen. Dried leaves were scattered across the highway most of the way and, staring into the side-mirror from my passenger seat, I could see the leaves ride the tailwind behind the van as we passed. It was looking like a really nice day.

Ettie and Saagaate were up front in the minivan, chatting and laughing away. Paul and Val were sitting in the seats ahead of me, talking about sports and other random guy things. I spent a few minutes watching the back of their heads as they made guy talk and laughed and belched and were just plain silly. They both, I had noticed, had cut their hair. Val's hair was shorter, almost like a military haircut. And Paul's hair, black and tightly curled, was very neat on the top, then faded and cut very short around the sides and back of his head. Val and Paul were so contrasting in appearance, one fair the other very dark. Val seemed slightly arrogant and excited. While Paul seemed to know he was very good looking, he wasn't vain about it; he was also much less hyper than Val. Watching the two guys, I still found it strange that Ettie was dating. Yeah, she's two years older than me and going into university next year. Still, it's weird to think about it. Hmm. I guess I might be dating soon . . . I'm not sure I'm ready for any of that though. I'd probably just freak out and act all weird. It's best if we were friends first—whoever the other part of that "we" is anyway. I looked to Ish and Wolf, arguing about some game they brought with them and who'd be the lead. I smiled as I looked out of the window of the SUV.

As we drove into the parking lot for the falls, I could already hear the noise of the rushing water. It wasn't as loud as it could get in springtime, but it sure was loud anyway. We grabbed all of the stuff. I had the blankets tucked under my arms and was glad I put on my warmer coat. The wind started to pick up a little and it was getting colder out. The falls were loud on this end with the picnic tables and there were shallow puddles of water near the brush that made some areas sloppy and muddy.

We got settled in the picnic area nicely. Ish and Wolf were already playing games and screaming and yelling as they bolted around on the grass like a couple of puppies. Val and Paul were getting firewood of mostly fallen twigs and sticks that weren't too wet and were now trying to set it on fire with some barbeque fuel they brought with them.

"Dude! You don't need to spray on the whole container!" Val told Paul, laughing.

"Hey, it's all about the big flames. Big flames!" Paul laughed, extending his hands out wide. Then, he threw on the lit match.

As a huge ball of flames blew up into the air, Paul and Val stumbled backward from the heat. I was laughing and so were Ish and Wolf who ran over to see it more closely. The acting-mothers of the group, Ettie and Saagaate, scolded the men about being stupid and dangerous.

As they all settled near the fire, pulling the picnic table closer so we were warmer during lunch, I grabbed some twigs from the bushes and threw them on before the flames burnt everything up too quickly. We ate slowly, all of us talking and laughing and teasing each other—or, more precisely, we teased Ettie mostly because of Val being her boyfriend now. She and Val

took it well; although I think she's gonna harp at me later when we get back to the house for bugging her. She doesn't take teasing very well, but I do it anyways because she needs to seriously loosen up.

After lunch, I pulled one of the blankets closest to the fire, settled down and opened up my current book about magic and supernatural creatures and vampires and all that good entertaining horror-like fluffiness. The boys were on the other blanket playing some new game with mini figures and hexagon shaped cards and a set of instructions that were insanely complicated but which the boys learned easily enough. The couples settled onto the picnic table across from each other playing fun poker.

After a little while Saagaate and Paul decided to go for a stroll down one of the dirt paths that ran beside the falls and its river.

It was at that moment, when Saagaate was turning to leave, that I visualized something. I saw her. She lay on her back, in a strange pose, with her eyes closed, on the muddy shore near the river. I wanted to tell her not to slip. It was almost out of my lips. I was ready to say it. Then she looked at me and smiled. I only smiled weakly back and watched her leave and she took hold of Paul's hand and smiled up at him. I still wanted to yell it at her as she and Paul turned the corner down the little path. I sat on the picnic table next to Ettie and leaned against her as she continued to shuffle the cards.

"Let's play something fun," Ettie clapped. "How about crazy eight countdown?"

"Yeah!" Val said, holding out his hands, ready for the cards to be dealt. "But Texas Hold 'Em would be better," he mumbled toward me.

"You in?" she grinned at me.

"Sure. You and I on a team?" I asked, a little glumly, but I tried to sound excited so I wouldn't start to ruin the nice moment for Ettie.

"It's 'you and me'. And sure, us on a team," Ettie smirked.

When we three were all on countdown number six, I thought I heard something behind the squabble from the boys play-arguing on the blanket.

I paused in my game, not really paying attention to whatever card I threw down, and strained my ears to listen.

"That's my card, Ish, and you know it!" Wolf hollered and Ish laughed, tossing the card over as if it were a Frisbee. The card whipped past Wolf's ear as he struggled to catch it. But, he fell backward off the bench and rolled head over heels into the grass behind him. Val and Ettie tried not to laugh—too much.

"Hey, man, that wasn't cool! You don't just whip 'em at people you know! Wolf yelled, thumping the card onto his pile and sitting back down.

"Well, pay attention then!" Ish, a smile at the corners of his mouth, yelled back louder than Wolf had, so loud I couldn't hear the noise again. I swore I heard it again at that moment. "And it's my turn so hand over—"

"Shhh!!" I hushed at the boys, frowning at them to be quiet. Ish stuck his tongue out at me and was ready to yell something again when I snapped at him. "Just shut up for a second, would you? I'm trying to listen to something."

Ettie looked around then back at me as I strained to hear again. "What was it?" said quietly. "A bear?"

"Someone yelling, maybe," I said, glancing over toward the path, and the others did the same too, but, where they were expecting a bear to come out, I wasn't. I knew I heard someone yelling. I knew who it was too, although I wish I didn't.

We all listened. Then, I heard it again. We all did. It sounded close to us. That yell, that scream, and the helplessness that was in the voice. Then, we heard bushes being whacked and whipped aside and footsteps running violently as the person vaulted around the corner and crashed into the dirt at the opening of the path.

It was Paul.

Val ran over to his frightened brother. The boys stood up, not moving from the bench as Ettie pointed at them to stay put. I stayed seated, not sure if I should get up and go over, not sure if I'd be of any help.

Paul was sobbing at Val, trying to talk, but sobbing and screaming so loudly. I could barely make out any of it. Then Val looked towards us, pale and scared. He glanced to the boys, then towards Ettie who was standing near him. I could only see her back. When her shoulders slouched, only for a second, I knew what had happened. She ripped her phone from her jeans pocket and dialed a number.

Her voice was shaky as she tried to sound calm and tried to talk to the person at the other end. "We need an ambulance—"



I don't really remember much of the conversation that happened after that. But Paul stayed at the picnic table with me and the boys, sobbing into his hands as Ettie and Val went down the path. I could hear the ambulance when the two came back. When they got to the picnic table, the ambulance people and some policemen were running towards us.

Val went with some of the men and women down the trail and Paul, still seated, was being asked questions by a policewoman. I tuned in to some of it.

"We . . . we were coming off the b-bridge. Sh-she just slipped on some ice," he managed to say through his crying. "I didn't even have time to grab her hand . . . or anything . . . she was just . . . gone . . . and she screamed. You could hear the sound of . . . It happened so fast."

"She fell into the river?" the policewoman asked Paul. Her voice was soothing.

"No," Paul said, looking up at her. "I tried to climb down to her but I almost fell too." Paul paled, swallowing slowly before he continued, as though talking about it made him relive it again and he had to brace himself. "She's on a boulder near the shore." I could barely hear him, but I did hear. I wished I didn't. I felt like throwing up. It was as I had seen her in the sudden vision!

I heard the policewoman asking for someone to call for an airlift. Then a lot of people came and a lot of lights and frantic voices came with them and then someone holding and moving my shoulders.

Later, I was in my bed, alone, chilled, staring up at the fading glow-in-the-dark stars as the hours and minutes and seconds passed. I realized that Saagaate would not have any more time. That she, wherever she was now, didn't have to worry about time anymore.

She was gone . . . and never coming back.

"Each individual creature was endowed with unique and singular powers proper to himself and his kind. Each had his sphere on earth, each his own time for the performance and fulfillment of his purpose and powers. Such was the general nature of animal beings" (from Ojibwe Heritage by Basil Johnston, 1994, p. 46).

Chapter 5

Close Friends

Beshwaji'

It was Tuesday and Ish, Ettie and I were staying home from school. I didn't think we would be at school this week. We didn't want to go. We sat around. Waiting for Wednesday. For the wake. For the funeral. We ended up cooking some of the moose meat, but freezing most of it for another time. I figured we would probably hand a lot of it out during the funeral.

Mom's sister, Auntie Cynthia, has been staying with us in the spare bedroom. Wolf is staying in Ish's room—at least there's the bunk bed in there. But Wolf has been pretty quiet. Ish has been spending all the days with him so I think that helps a little. Ettie cries in her room off and on during the day. She doesn't like people seeing her cry. She never has liked people seeing her cry. I tried to give her a hug but she shoved me off, weakly, because it just made her cry more. Auntie Cynthia sits on the picnic table in the backyard most of the time.

Cocom and Grandpa Benny came in to town from the bush late last night. They were sleeping in, a little . . . although that only meant they'd be up and ready by ten o'clock, which was really late in the morning for them.

It was close to lunchtime and I'd been on the couch all morning huddled in the corner with an old quilt my Mom had made. Ettie had finally come down and plopped next to me, taking the remote from my relaxed grip. Normally I'd have snapped at her for it, but I wasn't really paying much attention to the old movie playing and Ettie turned back to the channel anyway when she saw nothing else good was on.

"I think Auntie Cynthia will be staying with us for a while," she said, looking at me.

"Oh," I hadn't heard that bit of news yet, and was surprised that Ettie knew, considering she'd been in her room a whole lot since . . . since Saturday. "Well, Wolf will like that I think. I think Auntie will like it too. You know?"

Ettie nodded, knowing really what I meant, "Yeah."

It was odd, seeing Ettie so vulnerable. She's usually the protector, the one who talks back and is loud and smart and a good debater. I know she misses Saagaate a lot. They were best friends. Knowing she might not want a hug, cause yesterday when I tried, she had pushed me away, I decided to make her some food instead.

"Want some hot chocolate and some eggs and bacon?" I offered. "I'm starving too, didn't really have breakfast."

She smiled a little, for a tiny of a second. "Sure. Thanks."

And that's what I did. I had discovered that one way to help people feel better was to make them food. I made supper that night too with Cocom, spaghetti with Italian sausage that I bought with Cocom at the little market down the street. A part of me wondered too if I was doing this because I was feeling guilty. Guilty because I should have told Saagaate not to go, or to be careful . . . some warning. But what if it would've happened anyway? I didn't know. Maybe I was just keeping myself busy so I didn't have to think about it so much.



It was hard to realize that she wasn't going to speak anymore. Wasn't going to laugh. Wasn't going to give hugs. Wasn't going to run. Wasn't going to draw. Wasn't going to kiss or get married or have kids of her own. There wasn't anything she was going to do . . . not here with us anyway.

It took me a while to finally go up and see her. To see her body, her shell, to see something that her soul had lived in, to see what was Saagaate. Her lips were blue. You could tell that much past the rosy lipstick. Her dress had flowers on it. It was brightly coloured with some sequins on the bodice, and poufy at the waist down from layers of soft crinoline. Pastels, warm and cozy. Something she'd worn several times on special occasions, and would have worn more if she weren't worried about ruining it.

Ruining. To ruin.

I thought of decay. In the coffin. In the ground.

I shook my head, trying to shake loose the thoughts.

I stared at her hands. A small blue line across the back of her right hand. The only sign of her struggle. Of her last moments.

The funeral was that afternoon. Everyone was there. Family I hadn't seen since I was a child, family I see daily, family I see at get-togethers. Some of her friends from school were there too. The pastor, or priest, I'm not quite sure who it was.

After some sandwiches and tea in the parlor of the funeral home, I spent the rest of the day and night mostly sitting beside Ettie, being there with her. Talking briefly to relatives as they came and tried to chat with Ettie and me was the extent of anything active. Auntie and Wolf were always nearby, Wolf spending a lot of his time curled up against his Mom.

We all huddled together around her coffin that sat above its grave, waiting to descend into the dark, cold, earth. We silently kept warm, pressing our shoulders together as we mourned during the furious wind that came up that morning. I watched as Saagaate, nestled inside her last resting place, was descended into the ground. We each of us took turns placing a bow of cedar over her coffin. To cleanse her, to help her move onward wherever that onward led to, to help comfort us.

After the service we left the graveyard, the crunch of autumn leaves under our feet as everyone made their way back to their cars and homes.



Late October

She was falling through clouds. The ground miles below her. Reaching for me. Anger in her eyes. She mouthed, "Why didn't you tell me?"

I woke up. The moon shone through my window, bars of silver light across the walls, my desk, the floor.

I was crawling through a tunnel. The ground beneath me cool, wet, musky, musty. The sequential lights on the ceiling, silver and faint. Something brushed across my hand. I yanked it to my chest.

"Aandi ezhaayan?" someone whispered. I couldn't tell from which direction it came, behind, in front, above. The voice spoke Ojibwe . . . I understood it . . . Where are you going? The voice had asked.

"I don't know," I yelled to the voice. "I want to get out of here. Get me out of here!" I strained my eyes to the tunnel ahead of me; the light along the ceiling was a sheer haze of silver, the only illumination. Then something suddenly blocked the path. It wobbled there a moment. It screeched. Then it seemed to roll toward me, a mass of what looked like hair, tangled and drifting around what I knew was a head, as it moved toward me.

"Weenga zagiz," I said in Ojibwe. I am afraid.

My eyes flew open. Ralphie was sleeping at the foot of my bed. My movement woke him and he whined a little, got up and moved a little closer, then turned in a circle and lay down behind my legs. I reached down and petted his back. It was a comfort after the dream, knowing he was there, my little protector. I felt safer. Before my eyes shut again, I thought I could hear crying across the hall.

The wind was strong, blowing the trees, making the leaves clatter heavily against each other, the bows of younger trees bending, larger tree branches swaying. But other than the wind sounds and tree sounds, there was nothing else making a noise. No birds. No rivers. No animals. Nothing.

Except for him as he stepped out from behind a tree, leaning against it with his arms crossed across his chest.

I was used to seeing him now, despite his appearance.

"Where is everyone?" I asked him, raising my voice to cross the distance between us.

He shrugged his shoulders and grinned. He looked around toward my left.

A young man stood there, arms at his side, his face content. He wore leather clothing. A red fox sat near his side, ahead of him. In their eyes I saw a connection between them. They were family.

I looked to the man again; he was still leaning against the tree. He pointed to the left.

There was a woman. Possibly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen—which was saying a lot considering the movies I watched and magazines I read—was sitting cross-legged on the ground, brushing her long, thick, black hair. She looked up at me and smiled. A genuine and warm smile. I couldn't help but smile back.

I looked to the man again. I smiled at him, a small smile. I knew who he might be. Finally, I thought I had an idea.

He tilted his head at me. "Giga-waabamin menawaa."

See you again.

Arms hugged me from behind. It didn't frighten me. Then, they suddenly let go.

The ground sank beneath me, the grass along the sides of a deep and endless pit. I was suddenly falling.

I woke up on the floor.

My blanket was wrapped around my body, tight against my legs. Ralphie was long gone. He probably went to sleep in Ish's room.

"Traitor," I muttered as I scrambled up and spread my bed, sort of. Through bleary eyes, I looked at my alarm clock.

11:43 A.M.

After a quick trip to the bathroom that included a shower, I braided my hair in pigtails and went downstairs for some lunch. Auntie and Mom and Cocom had made beef stew and fried bannock. My mouth watered, and the rich and salty smell of the kitchen filled my mouth. I grabbed a glass of milk then sank into the only vacant chair at the crowded table. We waited until Cocom and Benny had started to eat first before we began.

"Morning! Glad to see you're finally awake," Dad said, spooning some stew into his mouth.

"Yeah, you totally slept like a lot," Ish said, shoving some buttered bannock into his black hole of a mouth that seemed to devour copious amounts of food and still be ever hungry. Wolf elbowed him gently in the ribs and barked a laugh. It was nice to hear the laugh, but nothing of the sort reached my lips.

"I kept having all these nightmares. It was bad. I kept waking up." I explained, dishing some stew into my bowl then reaching for the bannock. Mom, outside of her usual Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter times, had made the bannock yesterday. The smell was still in the kitchen. I didn't want to say that I knew everyone else probably wasn't sleeping well either, but nobody said anything else to that. I didn't want to say how guilty I felt either—that burden belonged to me.

"Nightmares are just your mind sorting through what's been happening," Grandpa Benny whispered to me. I wasn't sure if his advice helped or not.

"Oh hey," Mom cut the silence after a while with people eating. "Laurel and Zoe are going to come by this afternoon. They called about an hour ago, but I thought I'd let you sleep some more."

That made me smile. It would be nice to see them. I knew they would make me laugh and I needed some cheering up, even if just for a little bit. I really didn't think I was the only one feeling this way.

After eating, Ish and Wolf went outside again with Grandpa Benny and Dad. When I went to the window, I saw that I had missed quite a lot this morning while I was having my nightmares. They were building a small house out of scrap plywood and two-by-fours. My Dad and Grandpa Benny were doing as much as they could to keep the boys busy and to help them think of things other than Saagaate.

Ettie, my Mom, Cocom and Auntie were doing a puzzle at the living room table. I went up to my room, determined to do some cleaning up before my friends came.

I had been cleaning out junk from my desk drawers, when my door opened . . . only a few inches. I looked up to see the tiny face of a mostly white, short-haired kitten. Laurel's beaming face popped through the door next, then Zoe's grumpy one as she shoved Laurel forward nearly making her trip over the pile of garbage I had left by the door. After a scowl to Zoe, Laurel put the kitten in my face.

"What's this?" I smiled slightly at the little furry face.

"A moose!" Laurel teased. "It's a kitten, silly." She put the kitten in my lap and I picked it up. As I got a closer look, the white kitten had pale stripes of grey in its fur. Like wisps of fog.

Zoe plopped down on my bed, looking at the scattering of loose, old family and friend photos I had planned to put into my small photo album. She started going through them.

"I can see it's a kitten," I rolled my eyes, smiling. "When'd you get it?"

"I got it an hour ago," she clapped. "And it's for you!"

My mouth hung open. But, before I could protest, Zoe, bouncing on the bed, said, quite matter-of-factly, "We already asked your Mom and Dad and they said it was okay."

"Oh," I looked at the kitten's little face. It mewed as I stroked its back. If this kitten was a pity present, then I was okay with it. The kitten's eyes were a mix of yellow and green, with a nose half pink and half grey. "Hey, how come you're not at school?"

"PA day," Zoe blurted from the bed, photo pages flipping.

"Oh, I totally forgot," I said, now scratching the kitten lightly on its head. It started purring. I could feel the rumble.

"Tristan's cat had kittens a few months ago. His parents were going to give the last two to the pound when they couldn't find owners. So, of course we had to rescue them! I told him we

should give this little one to you, but he had already thought of it" Laurel told it like it was the sweetest bit of news in the world. Then, I wondered.

"When'd you see Tristan? Why?" I frowned at her.

Zoe laughed from the bed as she started putting the photos into the little album. "Jealous much?"

"Huh, I'm not jealous!" I defended myself.

"Sure, sure," Zoe laughed still. "He called me yesterday . . . about you. Cala gave him my number. They live right next to each other."

"Oh," I really didn't have anything to offer to that one. I still wasn't sure how I felt about Tristan. "You've been chummy with Cala for a while now. She seems nice."

"Yeah," Zoe breathed out hard. "We've started to hang out."

I smiled. "That's nice."

"Tristan wanted to know if you wanted the kitten. It's a boy," Zoe said.

"It was really quite the sweetest thing, you know," Laurel added, grinning from ear to ear and sitting herself down on the carpet and tossing the pile of garbage into a garbage bag that I hadn't even opened yet. She looked conspiratorially to Zoe for a few seconds then back at me, her head lowered. "He likes you, you know. Like, REALLY likes you."

I looked at Zoe. Her more logical self was something that I could turn to. She nodded and smiled. "Definitely."

I sniffed the kitten's head and then kissed it, burying my nose in its soft, short fur.

"Oh here!" Laurel hopped up and shoved a piece of paper in my hand. Again, the conspiratorial look to Zoe.

I raised my eyebrows. "What's this?"

"Just look at it!" Laurel practically squealed.

I rearranged the kitten on my lap and opened the piece of paper.

I hope you like the kitten. I saved him just for you—I made sure my Mom didn't give him away. I hope you're doing okay with everything. I'd love it if you could give me a call sometime.

It was a note from Tristan. He had also written his phone number. His name was scrawled in big, messy letters at the bottom. I wasn't sure if I would or if I wanted to call him.

"Okay, seriously, why don't you want to call him?" Laurel asked, responding to the look on my face.

"Yeah, what's up? He likes you. I'm pretty sure you like him," Zoe added, nearing the last of the scattered photos on the bed.

"I guess . . . I'm just not sure if he actually likes me or if he's just being nice," there, I said it.

"Ohh," Laurel's eyes widened. "Well he isn't Erik. Tristan really likes you. Honest. He even told me and Zoe this morning when we picked up the cat."

"Well, I'll go out with him but only if you all come too . . . the first time at least," my shyness crept through, flags and banners waving. Zoe and Laurel rolled their eyes.

"Fine, but I'll bring someone too then," Zoe blurted. I didn't know she was interested in anyone.

"Me too," Laurel smiled.

"Holy cow, how much did I miss this week at school?" I asked them, squishing the kitten lightly near my throat, his purring moved into my chest.

Zoe and Laurel laughed. I couldn't help but joining in. It felt good.

"What are you going to name him?" Zoe nodded at me.

"Oh . . . um," I thought about it for a minute. "What about London or Earl?"

Laurel laughed, "That seems really random."

"Well I was thinking his fur looked like fog. You know that drink I love? London Fog? Made out of Earl Grey tea?" I nodded at them, trying to get them to jump on the idea. "I thought it would be cute."

"We should vote!" Laurel clapped.

"Nah," Zoe said, smiling from the bed. "Let Miss Butterfly pick."

I smiled at her. "I'm going to think about his name over the weekend, I'll let you know on Monday what I picked! But thank you. Both of you. I love him!"

"Well, you should really call Tristan and thank him then!" Laurel teased.

Zoe poked Laurel quickly in the arm, laughing about it.



The next morning, I found Ettie in her room. She had set up her watercolour paints along her desk and was putting dabs of colour onto a white paint palette with little inset dishes. A large fresh canvas stood on a small desk easel in front of her.

She turned when the door creaked as I pushed on it some more. She turned back to the paints as I could now tell she was sorting them by colour. "Get out." She didn't bother looking up at me.

"Want me to help you take some paint out?"

"No."

I knew Ettie wouldn't open up. She was closed. Cement and mortar filling her brick wall. "Okay. No worries . . . want me to bring you some juice or something?"

"Milk," Ettie sounded tired, weaker. "And some Oreos."

"Okay," I closed the door quietly and came back up a few minutes later, putting the milk and cookies on the far end of her desk, away from the paints. I gave her a quick hug around her shoulders before I ran from the room, closing Ettie's door behind me.

I met Ish on the stairs, my kitten in his arms. "Don't go in her room," I warned him.

"Oh," he looked from me to the kitten in his arms, then stared at him before he stuck his arms out and offered him to me. "He was in the cupboard under the sink. He freaked out Mom when she opened it and he jumped out past her." We looked at each other. I got the sense that we both knew that normally we would find this funny.

"What's everyone else doing?" I asked.

"Umm . . . Mom and Auntie and Cocom are still doing that puzzle. And Dad and Grandpa Benny are almost finished with our fort in the backyard. That should be cool," Ish said, smiling slightly. Wolf bounded up the stairs, the kitten dug his little claws into my arm, scared by the sound of the loud running stomps. I cooed and said soothing words to the kitten until his tail wasn't so puffed up anymore. Wolf's face was red and blotchy and his eyes were quite puffed.

Wolf plopped onto the stairs beside Ish and leaned into his cousin's shoulder. After a moment, Wolf longingly stared at the kitten until I relinquished my precious little gift and slid the now calm kitten into Wolf's arms.

"If you're quiet and gentle with him, he'll purr while you're holding him," I suggested. That seemed to warm something inside Wolf and he smiled at the kitten. "Why don't you take him to Ish's room?"

The two awkwardly stood up from the stairs, but before they got too far, I grabbed them both in a bear hug with the kitten in the middle of us all. Then, Ish and Wolf walked quietly to Ish's room and sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor, slowly petting the kitten.

I sat on the stairs for a while, unsure of where to go in the house. I sat there thinking. Thinking too much. Thinking too many sad and dark things. After what felt like a long while, I stood up. My right leg had fallen asleep and I shook it to get the soreness out more quickly. I saw that Ish and Wolf were preoccupied with making Lego houses and having Lego adventures in the

middle of Ish's room and that the kitten was curled up near Ish's bed. I snuck in and scooped the kitten up.

I made cooing sounds to the kitten, which made him curl up against me and start purring. I placed him in the middle of my bed, and he snuggled up in a ball against my pillows. I went downstairs and I topped up the kitty's food bowl, filled his water, and cleaned out his litter box. I also grabbed myself some milk and Oreos.

I curled up on my bed with the kitten for a while, munching on cookies and sipping at the milk. I dipped the finger into my milk—it was Lactaid milk since most of us in the house were lactose intolerant—and let the kitten and his scratchy tongue lick the milk from my finger. He purred. I suddenly thought about what everyone must be talking about and thinking in the house. Wondering if I was being too anti-social . . . but, Ettie was too. They weren't on her case about it. We all deal with things differently. I like helping others. Some people like keeping busy and doing light things. Others do large projects, feeling good about getting something big accomplished. And others just distracted themselves with anything else they could think of.



The day before school, my Mom, Auntie, Cocom and Ettie still spent a lot of time on the couch together, or at the table, or working on the huge puzzle—a whopping 3500 pieces I found out. They were all talking, trying to laugh and be comforting to each other. Ish and Wolf still played a lot in the back yard while Dad and Grandpa Benny were finishing the playhouse. I wasn't sure where to go. After lunch, I hung out with my Dad and Grandpa Benny mostly, and sat in the armchair watching hockey games with them. Me, not really caring who won or lost but happy when a team that I slightly liked had won. The little white and grey kitten was always there.

"Thanks for letting me have the kitten," I told Dad during a break in the game.

"Ah, don't worry about it sweetie," my Dad smiled. "I know you always wanted a cat. Your mom and I don't mind. Just take care of him. He's your responsibility now."

"I know," I said, smiling at the kitten as he purred in my arms. I realized then that I was in charge of a life. This kitten's life was in my hands. My responsibility. I was determined to protect it. I promised myself that I would.

"Do you have a name for it yet?" Grandpa Benny asked, returning his eyes to the hockey game that picked up again.

"I was thinking either London or Earl . . . from that Earl Grey tea drink I like that's called London Fog. His fur reminds me of fog. But, I don't really like the name fog. He's kinda' white and blotchy grey though," I explained, turning the kitten around to look at his fur as I talked about him as he napped in my hands.

"What about Sir Didymus?" Ettie suggested as she came into the living room.

"Huh?" I asked, unsure of her meaning.

"Yeah. That little fox thing from that *Labyrinth* movie you love so much, the one that rides that dog," Ettie explained, a slight smile teasing the sides of her mouth.

"Oh, yeah! How could I have not thought of that name? Sir Didymus. Sir Didymus," I tested out the name.

"I like Sir Didymus. More meaningful and a lot more interesting than a name that comes from some tea," Dad said bluntly. "He's a bit too cute to be named after some tea concoction."

"Hello, Sir Didymus," I said to the kitten.

"Well, let's hope he doesn't start riding on Ralphie's back," Ettie teased and scratched the kitten's head.

"I'm sure he'll be a nice kitty. Isn't that right, Sir Didymus?" I asked the kitten in my arms. I returned my attention to the hockey game that was just ending the first period. Dad's team was losing 0-1.

At supper, Dad told Ish and me that we were going to school this week. Ettie was to stay home for another week. Wolf was staying at home too—but that didn't surprise me.

Lying in bed, later that night, Sir Didymus the kitten curled up on my pillow by my head, and staring at my stars—I had rearranged them into new constellations yesterday—I wondered if I'd be asked a lot of questions by people tomorrow, people other than my friends. I didn't want to be asked questions like that by people who weren't my friends and have to answer the obligatory "I'm sorry for your loss" or "you have my sympathies" like all the greeting cards. But, what else can you say to someone who's just had someone they loved die? I couldn't think of anything better.

The sound of little stones being thrown against my window got my heart pumping. I moved from the bed, leaving the kitten in a little warm ball next to my pillow. I went to my window.

Across the street. There he was.

The man from my dreams.

The feral man.

The man who smelled of earth.

Whose hands were of the earth.

He waved up at me.

He smiled broadly.

I yanked the curtains closed and jumped into my bed. I threw the covers over my head. After a few moments, I heard the rapping of a few more stones against my window. My heart hammered in my chest. I reached into my bedside table and took out my iPod and headphones. Somehow I knew, or thought I knew, that the stones weren't being thrown. But, I also thought I

knew that the sound of fingers were on my window and I could have heard them if I took my headphones out and really paid attention. I put on a movie, a children's cartoon, and listened and watched it until I fell asleep, the movie still playing.



In school the next day, I wasn't bothered or asked by people much about how I was doing. I got a bunch of hugs and words of sympathy, which weren't awkward like I was worrying they might be. My teachers also said how sorry they were, and offered any kind of help to me. I was also told I was going to be seeing the school counselor every day this week.

It was in between classes, when I was finally able to talk with Laurel and Zoe, as we exchanged textbooks from the mass of stuff we had crammed into our lockers.

"I've named him Sir Didymus," I announced. "He's always near me, the little cute thing, mostly quiet until he purrs really loudly."

Zoe laughed first.

"Aww," Laurel cooed. "That's a great name! You love that movie!" I was happy she got the reference right away.

"Yeah," Zoe agreed. "I mean I might've named him something like Zoltar or Thor or Titan or Krull or something, but Sir Didymus is good too!"

"Zoltar?" Laurel laughed and I joined in.

"I've got to speak to the counselor soon," I announced.

"Oh, that's right. I hope it goes okay," Zoe said, giving me a quick hug.

"Thanks," I checked the hallway clock. "I should get going. I'm seeing her in five minutes."

"Okies," Laurel said and gave me a sad little smile.

I stood in front of the counselor's office door and knocked on the writing that said "Ms. Makowski's" in black-stenciled paint.

"Hi Butterfly!" she greeted me with a large smile. "Come in. Have a seat."

"This your first day back in a couple of weeks. How are you feeling?" she asked with a pleasant smile. A smile that wasn't too bright but wasn't just for show. It seemed like she actually cared.

"Yeah, it's going okay," I offered.

"Is there anything you feel like sharing with me?" she asked. She leaned back casually in her chair. I suppose it was meant to help students feel more at ease when someone wasn't sitting there with a pen and paper in front of them waiting to record their every word.

"Well . . . it's been difficult," I said, not really offering up much.

"Yes, it must be difficult for you and your family. I'm sorry this has happened. What about it has been difficult for you?" Ms. Makowski sympathized.

"It's hard seeing my Auntie and Wolf hurting so much. Everyone in the house cries a lot. I cry sometimes too," I blurted. I was surprised I shared even that much.

"You have family staying with you?" Ms. Makowski asked.

"Yeah, my grandparents, my Auntie and my cousin Wolf," I explained.

"Your Auntie and Wolf were Saagaate's Mom and brother," she said.

I nodded.

"Do you talk with your Mom or Dad, or other members of your family about your loss?" she asked.

"Sometimes. We're just with each other mostly. We help each other out, even if it's just with the little things. That sort of stuff," I explained.

"How do you feel about the loss of Saagaate?" the counselor asked.

"Sad mostly. I feel guilty, like I wish I could have stopped it," I confessed. Ms. Makowski nodded. "And I don't really feel like myself. I don't really feel it when I smile."

"It's normal to feel a lot of those things," Ms. Makowski leaned in. "Have you tried expressing those feelings in ways other than talking?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Some people find that drawing, writing poetry, or writing songs can help them feel better," Ms. Makowski suggested.

"I haven't tried those," I admitted.

For the next half hour, I talked with Ms. Makowski about my feelings, about how I felt about Saagaate's death, how my family was supporting each other, and so many other little questions that she'd think of as she talked with me. I felt overwhelmed when I left. It was almost too much at once. Yet, I knew that some of what she said felt right for me; that it helped a little because she was also trying to help me.

I visited Ms. Makowski every day for a couple of weeks. I did lots of talking. Sometimes Ms. Makowski would talk and ask questions, but today, I talked a lot. I talked to her about the wake and the funeral. About how I noticed those details about how Saagaate looked, more than I noticed the people around me. But Ms. Makowski also asked about any fun things I had been doing. And in truth, I hadn't really had any fun things to do, not that I really felt like doing anything fun.

There was one thing that she told me today that I doubted. She said that it was okay to have fun. That it was okay to laugh. I suppose that to do those things didn't mean that I was being disrespectful to the memory of Saagaate, but maybe it was a way to keep moving on

through the healing process. Knowing that although Saagaate was not here physically, she could be here in memory and it was okay to remember the fun and happy things. That it should be okay for me to truly live and be happy and have fun.

I didn't feel like having fun though. I smiled. I laughed. But nothing reached my eyes or my heart. I was a puppet. Moving my own limbs and strings so others couldn't know that I was putting on a show of myself. I was now feeling like an imposter to my former self.

I needed to snap myself out of it. I knew that.

After I left Ms. Makowski's office, I texted Zoe and asked her to meet up with me. I waited for Zoe in the hall closest to her class so she could easily go out for a "bathroom break". That's when I saw him coming down the hallway. He immediately caught my attention.

His swaggered and confident walk.

His long, black hair swaying slightly from side to side.

His short stature.

He wasn't a little person. He was just really short. Like at or under five feet tall.

He came towards me as Zoe approached from the other direction. I watched as he strutted, grinning and nodding at the few girls who walked past him. Oh, he was totally a charmer. He stopped next to us.

"Hey there," he smiled slyly. "It's sth nith to see you fine ladieths, huh. You can call me Chuck."

Zoe laughed, I couldn't help but laugh too—but I wasn't sure if I really felt it inside or if I was just laughing because Zoe was. If it wasn't the sudden and blaring obviousness of his charm, suave, and utter fascination, it was the lisp that he had that made you like him instantly. Although he wasn't the typical tall, dark and handsome, you could tell he was a ladies' man—even for one who looked so young and short.

"Hello, Chuck," Zoe said.

Chuck smiled and winked. Then proceeded to shuffle around inside the locker nearest Zoe and me. Like, he literally stepped inside his locker as he was looking for whatever it was. He didn't really fit inside; he was just narrow enough and short enough to stand on the bottom ledge. Most of his back protruded from the rectangular space, and he looked like an overstuffed sock drawer that wouldn't close because the socks were too many and stuck out from the top. It took me a moment to realize that the brightness around him was from an installed, battery-operated light that was stuck to the back wall of his locker. I saw a slingshot (which Mr. Bianci would take away if he ever saw it) and some canned meat on the small top shelf. I took a moment during his determined search, to stare at him. His hair was long, in a set of tidy braids. Khaki pants, an off-white shirt that flopped open at the bottom, a cream-coloured leather coat, a chunky beaded bracelet on a band of leather, and a set of really cool moccasins with rubber bottoms made up his outfit. When he stepped out from his locker and turned to face me again, his smile was broad and wicked. There was a beaded-bone choker around his neck. A claw was tied on a

thin strand of leather that hung from his neck as well. But the claw was something I had never seen the likes of before; I had no idea which animal it came from. I didn't want to ask. I smiled at him. He winked at me before he slammed his locker shut and sauntered off down the hallway, whistling and making flattering remarks at the same few girls he passed earlier. He spoke briefly to a girl in a pink sweater; I could see her blushing from thirty feet away. When he got near the set of doors at the end of the hallway that led outside, he passed a group of football players in their gear and headed out, presumably, to the football field. I swear I could hear Chuck yell "Giants!" at them, as if it were a slanderous word.

The girl in the pink sweater made her way down the hall towards me. When she passed, I asked her what he said to her.

She blushed. "You don't want to know. Seriously."

Then, appearing from nowhere, were Sacha and Carol.

"Hide me," I said out in a quick huff to Zoe who gave me a perplexed look and shrugged in response.

"I'm not a moose. We're in an open hallway. Where exactly am I supposed to hide you?" she asked. "I could try shoving you inside a locker if you want." Zoe laughed. "Just go to your class, there's only twenty minutes left anyway."

I smiled quickly at Zoe and walked very briskly in the other direction from Sacha and Carol. I had been making an active effort to avoid talking to Sacha and Carol. Sure I'd see them in the hallway, but they or I were usually so engrossed in some separate conversation or activity that it was never an opportune time for the talk they were required to present to me. I wasn't ready to talk to them. I didn't want to talk to them. I wasn't sure if I'd scream or cry even if I did try and talk. But a part of me also knew that I was avoiding something I knew I'd have to deal with sooner or later. Just not now. It was too much. It was too much to deal with.

"As well as giants, or evil manitous, there were several different kinds of little manitous who dwelt in hidden recesses in the forests and meadows, on banks of rivers, and on the shores of lakes" (from The Manitous by Basil Johnston, 1995, p. 151)

Chapter 6

Tiny People in the Forest

Apa'chininiichug

It was Halloween night. Mom, Dad, Auntie Cynthia, and even Cocom had urged the boys to go trick-or-treating. "It'd be good for them to have a little fun and take their minds to someplace else," Cocom had said, and we all took her words to heart.

Mom and Auntie took the boys to get costumes the night before. Ish, to no one's surprise, had gotten a Spider-Man costume and Wolf's was Batman. The boys had spent an hour before our early supper playing their roles out quite animatedly in the living room. Dad had even dressed as the Joker and Ish and Wolf were crawling all over his prone body in the living room. Dad was yelling, "I surrender! I surrender!"

Dad took the boys trick-or-treating while Mom and Auntie went to the show and watched some horribly sappy chick movie. Ettie went out with some friends from school—she hadn't told me who, but I had a feeling it was her boyfriend Val. Cocom and I passed out candy that night. I could have gone out with my friends, but I wanted to keep Cocom company—this was the extent of my "fun" that Ms. Makowski suggested I make an effort to do. I dressed as a simple fairy, having borrowed Ettie's fairy wings she had made in Drama class last year, and Cocom dressed as an Old Lady. At least she said that was her costume, all she did was put on her moccasins and a flowered housecoat . . . plus she really was old. It made me smile.

I was in the living room close to midnight. Most everyone had returned home already and were asleep in bed, except for Ettie who wasn't back yet. Cocom had had the TV turned on low as it played old-school cartoon reruns, but now the channel was playing an old horror movie about nightmares and knives. Cocom was asleep, unfinished beadwork still in her hands. I took it, being careful with the needles, and put it back inside an old tin cookie can that she was using and placed it back onto the coffee table.

I relaxed on the couch and stared through the living room window. The wind was becoming colder and colder every day. It felt like it was going to snow soon. The orange, crunchy leaves on the ground were inviting that fluffy stuff to come and fall down on us all. I focused on the bush that was in the front yard—the same bush he was standing near last night.

I saw something move.

Something I had seen months ago.

Not the man from the woods in my dreams.

Something small, darting in and out from the thick willow bush.

Illuminated by the dim streetlights.

I watched as it came out.

Standing on top of the snow.

A very tiny, like under a foot high, person.

"You see them?" my Cocom, suddenly asked me, making me yelp and jump. Her voice was a trumpet blaring in the quiet house. At first, I thought she was talking in her sleep. Or teasing me, a random guess, making me think that she knew what I was thinking.

I turned to look at her. But, I watched her face. Her eyes were open and watching me. I was waiting for her laugh. It never came.

"They're the Apa'chininiichug," she finally said. Then, seeing the confused expression on my face, she added. "They are the little people. They are allowing you to see them. It is a privilege to see them," she turned her head to the window. I didn't know if she could see them. I didn't ask. I didn't ask because I was afraid that she couldn't see them at all.

"But, why?" I asked, but it sounded more like I had blurted it out like a statement rather than a question.

At that, she smiled at me then stood up slowly from the couch, her bad hip rocking as she gained her balance, and headed up the creaky stairs to her temporary bedroom that she shared with Auntie. I wondered if I had actually and unknowingly done something wrong.

I spent the next couple of hours, alone in the living room, except for Sir Didymus who was curled up on my lap, staring out of the window and straining to see any more movement in the bush that was in the front yard, straining to see anything through the shadows.

They were peering from the trees. So many of them. The Apa'chininiichug. It seemed like they were curious, but not wanting me to really see them clearly. They lived in the trees, homes hidden in them and on the ground too. Only out of the corner of my eye, in my peripheral vision did I see them. Then, suddenly, they surrounded me. They were staring up at me, reaching out—

I woke up suddenly, as if it were a nightmare, but not really. Just . . . disconcerting. I was still on the couch. Sir Didymus was asleep above my head on the couch cushion I had grabbed for a pillow at some point during the night. Ish and Wolf were both crammed on the living room chair next to the couch, watching cartoons at a barely audible level.

"What time is it?" I asked, sitting up and feeling creaky.

"Like ten-thirty," Ish said, waiving me off as he tried to listen to the TV. Wolf had grabbed the remote and was turning the volume up to a decent level.

"You go outside last night?" Wolf asked me.

"No . . . I was here the whole time," I answered, confused. "Why do you think I went out?"

"You've got stuff in your hair," Wolf pointed in my direction and turned his head back to the TV.

"Ohh, maybe she sleep walked!" Ish slapped his hand on the chair arm.

I looked down at my hair. Scattered here and there were little downy feathers, from a chickadee or something, in my hair. Moving my hand to brush one off I noticed something. I picked up a handful of my hair. Feathers, about five of them, were actually tied with thin strands of thread to my hair. I bolted off the couch, Sir Didymus chasing after me and then overtaking me, as I raced up the stairs and into my room. I slammed the door shut and stared at my hair in the mirror.

There were a lot of feathers in my hair. When I got them all taken out, there were twenty-one. I folded the feathers, with the little strands of string used as ties, into a makeshift envelope from a lined piece of paper from my school binder. I placed it in the back of a drawer in my desk. Ettie came in just as I was closing the drawer. She stared at me from the doorway.

"What's up?" I asked when she still hadn't said anything.

"Nothing, just wanted to say hi," she smiled weakly. I gave her a small smile back. We hadn't talked about what had happened that day. Not yet.

"You okay?" I asked, moving closer, fiddling with the light stitch on the wall.

She shrugged. Her eyes started to water. Her nose turned a darker shade of red. I moved forward and gave her a hug, my own worries and guilt forgotten. I hadn't even thought what Ettie must have been feeling—the day trip to the falls had been her idea. She actually hugged me back. I felt her shoulders shudder. I cried a little, wondering why I wasn't feeling more. I was sad. I knew that much. I was guilty; I knew that, I definitely was. But I also felt . . . hollow.

After a few minutes, standing like that, still hugging each other, her shoulders quieted, she stepped back and wiped her nose on the back of her sleeve.

"We're starting another puzzle. This one actually has something in it other than a whole ton of trees," she sniffled in between words. I took the pouch of tissue paper from my school bag and gave it to her. She blew her nose.

"What's it of?" I asked as she finished up.

"A deer . . . in front of a whole ton of trees," she smiled a little.

I chuckled, more for effect than feeling. "Sure."

"Violation of Spiritual laws can affect the physical world. Violation of physical laws can affect the spiritual world. A balanced life is one that honours the laws of both of these dimensions of reality" (from The Sacred Tree by Lane et al., 2004, p. 27)

Chapter 7

Tricky, Tricky and the Knife

Banaadendam

Early November

I decided to take Ralphie for a walk one afternoon, giving Dad a break, since he was sick in bed with the flu. The park near our house blended into the woods near the outskirts of town. I took one of the hilly paths that meandered throughout the park; it was one of the longer paths. A little while into my walk with Ralphie, I noticed that the hill I was about to climb, turned to the right and it reminded me of the hill in my dream. That path.

Ralphie barked just then and I looked to my right. The stream that cut through the park flowed into a larger river further down. Ralphie barked again, running forward a bit then abruptly stopping, his tail standing straight and still in the air. I tried to look through the trees for anything, any movement, but saw nothing. It was then that a crow cawed and I heard some bushes cracking down the small footpath that ran along the stream.

"Hey!" I called out. The snapping of twigs suddenly stopped.

Was that an arm sticking out from behind a tree? It was bare, and looked very dirty. I edged closer. Ralphie was pulling on his leash and pulled me, giving me the extra courage to go nearer. I stepped on a twig and the crack seemed to echo all around me. I looked down. Mud was seeping through the snow on the ground. The mud started to collect on the sides of my boots. There were a lot of twigs around here from those strong winter winds that blew them from the trees. I looked up. The arm was gone. "Hey, wait!" I called out and ran to the tree. Ralphie was still pulling me along, just as eager to see what or who it was as I was. But what was I doing? It could've been a crazy person, a murderer, a rapist. I was at the tree. I walked around it.

There was nothing there. No footprints, nothing that showed any sign a person had been there. The crow cawed again, further away, flying away.

I headed back to the main path, whistling at Ralphie who seemed to want to stay and sniff at the ground, eat the snow lying there. He went for a big poop and I had to pick it up with a plastic bag that had been tied to the leash handle. I could feel the heat and gooeyness of Ralphie's poop through the plastic. Yuck!



The next night, I was staring out of the window above the sink. Snow, big, fat snow, was falling very slowly outside, as if it had all the time in the world to fall down to the ground. Everyone had gone out of the house on some errand. Dad went to go to the gym now that he was feeling a bit better. My Mom and Cocom and Auntie had Ettie and Ish and Wolf with them at the

grocery store. I had some homework to do and didn't want to wait till later tonight to do it cause I knew I'd probably get distracted by something silly on TV.

I wanted to feel happy again. Genuinely happy. I laughed for real last week, but that was only once. I wasn't sure I even felt sad at all anymore. Just that same numbness. I kept telling myself the same thing: make yourself feel happy. I thought I needed a better coach. Maybe when things become more Christmas-y I'd feel better. Christmas time always made me happy.

I wished I felt something though, anything. Everything felt numb.

And, that's when I saw it. The knife rack.

I slid the paring knife, the one with the smooth, small blade, from its sheath in the pale, wooden rack. As I moved it over the sink, the sun reflected off of it for a moment and caught my eyes. Then, it was just an ordinary knife. Not a glinting, frightening knife you see in the movies when bad guys whip them from their pockets. It was just a simple and plain kitchen knife.

Well I wasn't about to go killing myself with a knife. Any knife. Or anything. Killing myself wouldn't solve any problems and I imagined what my parents would feel afterwards. I couldn't do that to them. Isn't that what those doctors say anyway, that suicide doesn't solve any problems? Besides, there's lots of other ways to die and I wasn't brave enough to do any of them to myself. Is that even a brave thing to do? I didn't know. I wanted to live. I did. I just wanted this, all of this, this goddamn bullshit to be over with. I couldn't handle it anymore. I didn't feel anything anymore!

No.

I do feel.

I feel hate.

Searing hate that boils in my stomach until I feel it spreading through me until I can't hold it inside anymore but I do anyway and then it subsides like a hole that you've dug, but it fills up with water again even after you've scooped it out with a cup. Hate that fills up again and again because of her death. Hate that comes back because she died. Hate that's always there because I cannot turn back time and tell her not to go. Hate that I had to see her lying in her coffin. Hate that she looked so still, so stiff, so . . . lifeless.

I also feel guilt.

I imagined myself screaming at her not to go as she headed down that path. But it was only in my mind, wasn't it, because I never did say anything to her. Not a thing. But I knew it would happen. I felt it then. I saw it. I ignored it. And since then, I haven't felt much.

But with the knife in my hand, I wanted to feel something.

I held it under the hot water rushing out of the tap. Was I actually cleaning the knife? Yeah. I didn't want to get an infection after all. I took the knife from the water and stared at the serrated blade as the water evaporated from the metal. I held out my index finger.

I brought the knife down in a quick swipe over the flesh on the tip of my finger.

I didn't do it hard enough. Nothing really happened.

Bracing myself, I cringed, gritting my teeth, and brought the blade down again. I could feel what I just did and I waited those precious few moments when it came.

I breathed

in

and

out,

s l o w l y.

My eyes closed.

Ahh.

There it was.

Pain.

Pain that makes the hate go away. Pain that makes the numbness subside. A stinging pain. A burning sensation that brings out a string of dark cherry red blood. A flowing blood that meant life and living. Then a drying blood, a darkening blood that meant the end of death and the healing of life. I watched my finger as the blood stopped flowing ever so slowly out from the cut.

I ran my finger under the water tap and watched the blood that had dropped into the sink slowly rinse away. In the bathroom, I rinsed off my finger with iodine. Did it ever sting! It was even worse than that quick little cut! I put some anti-bacterial cream on the cut and wrapped a bandaid neatly over my finger. I made sure to wash the knife well and then I placed it back in the rack. It was as if nothing had ever happened. But it had, and for the first time in weeks, I had felt something other than hate and nothingness.

Ralphie's whining just then reminded me that I hadn't taken him out yet like I was supposed to. So I put on Dad's extra boots and coat and trudged out into the middle of the yard while Ralphie did his thing. I liked the feeling of being in my Dad's huge coat and boots. When I put them on it made me feel like I was five again playing dress-up. I turned left and walked down the sidewalk. I noticed that a house a few houses down from mine was up for sale, the sign stuck into the yard like a flag.

The wind outside wasn't too strong, but it was cool and I lifted my face up to feel it against my skin. The snow was tiny now, and falling slowly. I stuck my tongue out, hoping to catch some of it and felt the cool little bits of ice melt. Most of it landed elsewhere on my face and some on my eyelashes. I turned back down the street toward my house, my shoulders hunched in the coat. I turned left again, down the street that ran perpendicular to my house and went down the road; I looked down the street and saw the entrance to the park. I could see some tracks made in the snow, probably from other people walking their dogs, or even kids from the

neighborhood taking their sleds and whatnot out for a ride down the park's steep but short hill. Then, I saw something. There was some movement in the forested area next to the path. I thought it was a deer, at first, standing really still. But I realized it looked too small to be a deer. It moved from the trees and onto the path. It stood there facing me. Was it looking at me? Ralphie made a whining sound off to my left and I called him next to me where he sat and leaned against my leg.

"It's okay," I reassured him. Or was it myself I was trying to help feel less scared?

It moved again. Forward, very slowly. As if it was stalking. No. It was hunting. It was on the road now, still moving toward me. I could see the wolf's shoulder blades from side to side on its back as it continued, head down, sniffing the ground. I stepped back, Ralphie followed. Just then, it stopped, let out a short yip, spun around and ran back into the woods again. When it disappeared, Ralphie stood up, barked, and wagged his tail. I chuckled. We came back inside and I pulled out my history homework from my backpack and finished it on the living room couch.

Everyone came back about an hour later, my Dad first, who hopped into the shower, then Mom came in with everyone else trailing in behind her with grocery bags in their hands. They dropped them on the counter then came in to the living room to watch TV.

"Do you three have homework to do before tomorrow?" Mom called out to Ish and Wolf and Ettie. I could hear Ettie groan next to me.

"I'll do it while I'm watching TV—it's an easy assignment," I could hear the hope in Ettie's voice. I think to some degree we were getting away with a lot of stuff lately.

"Yeah! Me too!" Ish and Wolf yelped too – they were now in the same class - and ran to get their bags from their bedroom upstairs.

"Get my bag while you're up there, would you?" Ettie yelled after them.

I got up and started helping Mom put some of the groceries away, giving Cocom my spot on the couch. In the last bag on the counter, I found a blank un-lined journal. It had a hard cover and was purple, my favourite colour.

"Who's this for?" I asked even though I already assumed it was my Mom's; she was always sketching in books or writing some type of poetry.

"You," she said.

"Me?" I looked at the book more closely. The pages were smooth and crisp. I even liked the smell of it. "Why though?"

"Everything can't be held in all the time, pumpkin. You've got to let it out somehow," she gave me a hug.

I gave a little smile and held the book to my chest. She took out a sketching pencil set from the bag too and handed it to me.

"What about you? Any homework?" Mom asked, running her hand through my hair as she walked past and put the milk into the fridge.

"I finished it already," I smiled at her and she nodded back, eyebrows raised. Being on time has never been my strong suit and when I finished anything early, it felt like an extra achievement.

"There are some cookies in one of the bags if you want any," she suggested. "Bring some out for your brother and sister too."

I did just that and sat on the chair in the living room, hogging the remote and turning to a reality show about ghost hunting as I chewed through a monster chocolate chip in a cookie. I tucked the blank journal under my leg along with the pencil set. I already felt comforted.

A short while later, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sir Didymus sneak along the wall down the staircase and into the living room. With a tiny grunt he jumped onto the arm of the couch and walked along its back towards me, stepping down onto my shoulder and then onto my lap where he curled into a little ball and set himself to purring loudly. Finishing the last of my cookie, I was ignoring the fact that Ettie and Ish were both yelling at me to turn the channel until Cocom shushed them with some *tch tch* sounds with her tongue, taking the remote herself and changing the channel to a home decorating show.

"Wow, I'm glad I did my homework earlier," I said out loud, watching Sir Didymus' chest move in and out as he breathed. I turned to Cocom who *tch'd* at me a couple of times. I felt my face turn red.

"Do you know of a man in the sacred stories who appears in people's dreams or talks with humans and gets them to do things but not really?" I whispered at her a few moments later.

Cocom furrowed her brows as she thought, and turned to me. "Not anyone who specifically visits dreams. But a trickster can look human. He gets humans to do things, or to cause things to happen. Why?"

"I've been dreaming about him. I think he hides from me. But he talks to me. I . . . I think I saw him from my bedroom window before. He was throwing rocks up at my window." Cocom stared at me still, probably wondering if I was lying or joking.

"Try to stay away from him if you can. He's a trickster, that one there. We call him Weesquachak," she said to me. She had leaned forward and was whispering like I was. Then, she turned back to watch her decorating show.

In my room, I practiced saying his name, Wees-ka-chak. Weesquachak the Trickster.



In school the next day, Laurel sidled up to me, leaning on the lockers next to mine. She was chewing on some fruity gum and hopping on her heels.

"Guess what?" she asked. There was a wide smile stuck on her face and I can see the gum being chewed from one side of her mouth to the other. I was just about to ask when she blurted out the answer anyway. "Dillon asked me out!"

"No way," I couldn't really picture Dillon finally asking Laurel out. He was always so quiet around her. I wondered if he had used a note to ask her out.

"Well, sort of. We're just going to his house after school, I want to copy some songs of his for my mp3 player," she played with her hair, still grinning.

"I'd have thought you would've ended up with Erik," I said.

"Erik? Why Erik?" she was honestly confused by my bluntness.

I laughed to ease the tension that suddenly emerged. "You went on about how cute he was before. I just thought you'd two would date or something."

"No way!" she grimaced. "Sure he's cute. But he's like way too into himself. That's not the type of guy I'd ever want to date."

"Well Dillon seems great and everyone can tell how much he likes you," I complimented.

"What do you mean, 'everyone'?" Laurel asked. Her cheeks quickly became a blotchy red.

"Laurel, it's been so completely obvious that he's had a crush on you for the longest time now," I said and giggled. Laurel occupied herself with something innocuous in her locker for a minute; I presumed that it would allow enough time for her blushing to subside.

And that's when I saw him again. I'd seen him in the halls for two weeks now. I nudged her arm and motioned for her to look behind her.

Chuck. His muscular, compact frame and long black, braided hair were distinct. He high-fived some of the guys who were standing in groups along the hallway, like sentries to their lockers and their secret boy talk.

"Hey ladyesth," he winked at Laurel as he approached us. "Wasth up?" I noticed his lisp again and it still suited him. I thought it was cute and couldn't help but smile.

"Hi," Laurel said, giving him a little wave. "Wasn't drama epic today? The way Mrs. O'Shay mimed out that beaver making a dam. Using her feet as the tail," Laurel was laughing so hard I could barely make out what she was saying between snorts and inhales and hiccupping words.

Chuck smiled at her, laughing heartily. "Yeah," he said. "It really reminded me of thomething too." He looked at me as he answered Laurel.

"How'd they let you in anyway, the semester's like half over," Zoe cut in as she shoved some books into her ever-filling locker. It seemed like she must've had more clothes in her locker than at home.

I watched as Chuck stared at Zoe, his eyes wide, and his lips lifting at the edges, slowly, turning into something wicked. I could hear the slyness in his voice and he sounded almost proud, "Exsthenuating sthircumsthtanthes."

"Extenuating circumstances?" Zoe repeated, dumbfounded. "What the heck's that supposed to mean?"

Chuck simply shrugged, a smirk on his face, then turned and strutted down the hallway, eyeing the girls along the hallway like he was a cat waiting to pounce on a moth in the grass.

"I woke up this morning with Sir Didymus sleeping on my neck," I suddenly blurted out and it took a few seconds for Laurel and Zoe to understand what I was talking about.

"You're so random," Laurel chuckled, hooking her arm through mine as we three headed off to the cafeteria for lunch.

"Ah that's okay, that's why we love you," Zoe teased, sticking her tongue out at me. I wrinkled my nose at her. "I think my cat's cool. I love your cat though; he's really chill and purrs like a storm! But, I love my cat most. Ahhh, Bruno." We all laughed. Zoe's cat was the fattest cat we'd ever seen and all it did was lie at the foot of her bed, purring, and chewing on this yellow fuzzy duck toy that was completely dirty and had a couple of rips in it where the stuffing was popping out.

I loaded up on poutine (the cafeteria made the fries smothered in an awesome gravy and topped with real cheese curds), a small salad, an apple, and a large milk for lunch. That was one thing the cafeteria had going for it. The school with its new healthy eating thing, was actually making better food: fresh sandwiches, veggies, salads, wraps, yummy. Well, poutine isn't exactly on the healthy eating list, but I felt like splurging, and at least they still had a junk food option every day.

We three sat at our usual table next to a partitioned wall with a mural of some grassy landscape and all sorts of teenagers romping around on it. It was actually pretty interesting to look at. Some art students made it a few years ago for partial credit.

Cala sidled up to Zoe, nudging her shoulder. Zoe smiled and seemed to blush, then she invited Cala to sit with us. Cala had a few library books with her. One was a new zombie book I had heard about, but I hadn't had the inclination to go to the bookstore to look for it.

"I love zombie stuff!" I said excitedly, although I didn't feel it like I used to. "Can I see the book for a minute?" Cala handed it to me smiling and started to chat with Zoe about her house in the country. She mentioned that her house was about forty-five minutes away from town and she picked up the habit of reading while on the ride to and from her house every day during school.

My bandaid slipped off my finger while I was eating. The skin was puckered a little and the cut, which didn't sting, felt a little itchy. I played with the flap of skin where the cut was. I fished around in my bag for an extra bandaid while Laurel yapped on about Dillon.

As I was wrapping it around my finger, enjoying the feel of the new bandaid, Dillon came to the table with Tristan and Erik standing next to him. Awkward, to say the least.

"Is it okay if we sit with you?" Dillon asked. I looked to Laurel and saw her cheeks become red and a bit blotchy. She fidgeted with her hair.

"Yeah," Zoe spoke. "Grab a seat." She motioned for them to take up a couple of the extra seats at our table.

The boys sat down across from us and we started chatting about the assignments we had to do for our classes. It was a few minutes before we had to leave for classes that I saw Dillon slide a piece of folded up paper to Laurel who snuck it into the palm of her hand. It was also this time when Tristan asked me something. He asked me again.

"Are you okay?" he said. Looking into his face, I knew it wasn't the question you asked people to be polite and not really caring what the answer is. He was actually concerned. I had been careful to fake a smile and fake laugh lately. Careful to pretend that I was how I used to be. And, although I did laugh at times, rarely did I really feel true happiness from it.

I decided to be honest with him. "Sort of," I shrugged. "It's hard . . . I keep thinking about it."

He nodded. And in that nod, I knew he could actually tell what I was feeling, that he had felt it too with something else. "Yeah . . . a couple of years ago my grandfather died when we were out fishing. He had a heart attack. I had to drive the boat to the dock by myself and had to wait half an hour before somebody happened to come by." We were leaning toward each other then. Our heads were so close that I could smell the eucalyptus from his shampoo. Eucalyptus was one of my favourite smells, I had tea tree oil and eucalyptus shampoo and conditioner that I used daily. It seemed we had another thing in common. We talked in hushed voices so that not everybody around us would hear. He continued. "I tried to do CPR, but I only ever saw it done on TV and in the movies. There wasn't anything I could do. He died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital."

"You tried though, that's what counts," I said to him, wanting to hold his hand.

"Yeah, I know," he said quietly and I could tell it still upset him. Of course it still upset him. Something like that, something like what I saw as well, doesn't go away quickly.

We met back up with the rest of our friends while we still had some time left during lunch.

Science blew by. We were busy working on our culminating activities.

In music class, I played as in beat to the music as I possibly could, trying my best to hit every note in the fast runs. After the class practiced a few songs, Mr. Garrett made an announcement.

"Just a reminder for everyone, the songs we're working on now, we'll have to perfect for the public performance on the last day of school before Christmas break. So, we all need to put in some extra practice."

There was a slight groaning and an air of excitement from the class as Mr. Garrett finished. We loved and were nervous of public performances, mandatory as a part of our mark.

We played a few songs from the 60s and I could hear Tristan playing louder than usual in his spot behind my left shoulder. At least this was something we also had in common, venting out our hurts by playing and concentrating on the music. I hummed the songs during the bars when I wasn't playing my flute.

Half way through class, after we had finished playing a song all the way through without any mess-ups, a grinning Mr. Garrett said that he had a surprise for us.

"I'd like to introduce you all to the Turtle Island Singers!" he proclaimed and we saw four young men, probably just out of high school, come in with a big drum and their drumming sticks.

After a couple of minutes of set up, the group started thrumming on the drum. I could smell the lingering scent of smudge on the group—sitting in the front row made it easy to do that. The four encircled the large drum. One young man, his hair in long braids, began softly at first, then louder and louder as the other members joined in. I thought of nothing, only heard the song and the beats of the drum. Their voices, a mixture of sounds and Ojibwe words and phrases, almost like a story in parts, echoed off each other, added to the loud beats of the drum that reverberated and vibrated into my chest, and my heart seemed to thump louder in response. It was loud in the room, but the music enthralled me, it swept around and inside me, holding me in.

When they finished, I was so very relaxed. But my heart ached because I did not want it to stop. One of the members, the Drum Keeper, talked about the importance of the drum, the importance of the drum ceremonies, and some of the protocols around drumming—what you should and shouldn't do. Another member took out a hand drum and talked about how he had made it, how he would have to heat it over the fire, for reasons other than tightening the raw hide so that the sound would become clearer.

I left class, a stupid grin on my face.

"I'll drive you home," Tristan suggested as we were all gathered in the parking lot chatting before we all went to our homes.

"It's okay, I'll walk," I said.

Tristan pouted.

His hand was suddenly grasped around mine and I felt inclined to follow his lead as he walked to his car. His hand was warm. His fingertips were calloused from playing guitar. His hand was strong, yet gentle.

My smile lingered on my face even as Tristan drove me home.

"Listen to and follow the guidance given to your heart. Expect guidance to come in many forms; in prayer, in dreams, in times of quiet solitude and in the words and deeds of wise [E]lders and friends" (from The Sacred Tree by Lane et al., 2004, p. 82).

Chapter 8

Blue Butterfly

Ozhaawashkwaa-Memengwaa

Mid November

There was a wailing and zephyr-like howl in the distance. The frigid wind brought it to me. It made the nearby ice-coated trees and their branches rustle lowly. I was standing in a snow-covered meadow. The sun was low in the cloudless sky and rested opposite the copse of trees. The wind, nearly hypothermic in its coldness, blew over the trees and crashed over the field like a tidal wave. It was so deeply cold that I felt like my insides were becoming cold too. It felt as if I was becoming like ice. I clenched my hands into fists. My fingers, my knuckles, and all of the tendons and all the bones in my hands creaked like the frozen branches that I saw not twenty yards away from me.

Deep inside me, I began to feel a hunger.

It was a ravenous hunger for something I couldn't name.

Another long and sorrowful howl.

Closer this time. It came from just beyond the trees.

A brush of wind followed a third and pitiful howl. The howling wind that accompanied it was like a yearning breath against the back of my neck. I turned my face towards the sound. My hair whipped across my face as if I were running through those leafless trees.

I turned from the trees and ran towards the sun.

I clutched my thick, dark wool shawl closer to my chest. I felt the coarse wool biting into my fingers as I fought to keep what little warmth was left inside me.

My bare feet became numb as I ran through the layered snow. Through snow that felt all at once, soft and thick, iced, and crystallized.

I woke up feeling chilled. I slipped into my mink fur-trimmed moccasins and a royal blue velvet zip-up hoodie. The dream slipped through my mind as if I was trying to hold water in the palm of my hand; the water always found a way through and what little did remain was only a few drops at most. There were only small fragments left of the dream. A feeling. My hair. The wind. The snow.

Six times. I've made those little cuts on my fingertips six times so far. A small, fresh cut on my index finger from the night before stung deeply and I felt a continuous throb. I had cut too

deep. It had really hurt when I made the cut. I made no attempt to coddle it. The other little cuts were either healed or barely visible. This last time, last night, hadn't brought me the same sense of feeling like the first time. There was no relief there. Now I just felt dirty. Like smudges on an already dusty old window. Like rust on the bottom of a car that ate its way through the metal and paint no matter what you tried to do to cover it up or fix it. Like ink bleeding its way across cotton fabric, it was slow and permeating and determined.

It took a lot of effort for me to wake up in the mornings. It took me a long time to get out of bed. I was barely making it to school on time. I wrote in my journal when I woke up. I scribbled down what I remembered of my dreams. I wrote, angrily and so rough that I'd ripped through pages, what I had been feeling. Was it possible to feel so many things at once? Was that really what I was feeling? Over and over, like a chant in my head, I thought: *There's no point. What's the point? What's the point of everything? Why bother waking up and doing mindless, pointless, stupid things? Nobody would care if I didn't do those things.* I didn't like thinking those things. I wanted things to change. But I didn't know how.

The chanted words echoed in my head still as I left my second period class and wandered, not quite aimlessly, into the school courtyard that was the centre of the school, surrounded by the three floors of windows, and open to the sky. I hadn't known someone was following me. I hadn't known that the one someone in the world right now that could and would break me, was following me: Tristan.

"I can't do this anymore," I sobbed into my hands. "I'm sorry. You don't need to be with me, go to class, I'll meet up with you later." I gripped the comb tightly, nearly breaking the skin until I finally let it go. I stared at the indents in my palm; the deep red dots were already fading. The benches had been cleared of snow and there were worn paths crisscrossing through the area to each of the doors that entered the school. It wasn't as freezing today as it had been most of the week.

"Yes, you can," Tristan said, placing his hand on my forearm. His fingers, strong and large, wrapped around my skin. His hand was warm, almost sweaty, and I realized how cold I felt. I shivered.

"I keep feeling like she's in some awful place, or stuck somehow there where she fell," I stared into his eyes. "I can't get it out of my mind, that I could have stopped it from happening."

"It's not your fault, you know," he reassured me.

"What if I had told you I saw it happen . . . before it did?" I turned to him, watching his face, his flash of expressions as I asked the questions.

"Well, if you did, maybe you still weren't meant to do anything about it. Maybe you couldn't have stopped it even if you did warn her," he said. And I don't know what I expected from him. But it really wasn't that. I thought he'd hate me for it. I thought he'd yell at me. I thought he'd be disgusted and tell me never to talk to him again. I had imagined all sorts of horrible reactions. Instead, he offered me a way to know that I cannot control everything in my life. He, in that simple phrase, let me know that perhaps when someone was meant to die, nothing could ever change that.

"Maybe," I replied, not sure. I doubted my own guilt and hesitated to let go of it for fear that what I was feeling was what I was meant to feel. If I no longer felt guilty, a part of me felt that I was dishonouring the memory of her. I fiddled with the bandaid, a fresh one from the other day. Some skin was just dangling, like a curtain over the now healing cut even though it was still sensitive to touch. I saw Tristan staring at my hands as I played with the covering. Then I felt myself wanting to tell him about the cut. I felt myself wanting to share with him why I did it, but why I didn't want to do anything more . . . harsh. It was strange though, not telling my sister or my best friends first. I guess because he wasn't as close to me, it felt safer. "It wasn't a bad paper cut," I hear myself say so quietly I wasn't even sure Tristan could hear it. But he did.

"Okay," he spoke quietly, urging me gently.

"I wanted to feel something. Something other than the sadness, and the hatred, and the guilt, and the numbness to anything happy and good. I wasn't even feeling it when I laughed. I was pretending to laugh just to make people feel like they didn't have to ask me how I was feeling. But I wanted them to ask how I was doing. I wanted them to ask without me having to get them to. I wanted them to see past the façade. A few weeks ago I started cutting my fingers. This last one went really deep. I can't feel the tip of my finger. I think I cut a nerve or something. It's not to the bone or anything, nothing so deep as to need stitches," I paused for a shaky breath, staring at my hands still. Not daring to look at Tristan in the face. "It scared me, cutting that deep. It's probably going to leave a scar. But, I never cut anywhere else. I don't even want to cut my fingers again after that. I don't want to kill myself either." I looked at his face then, his serious yet compassionate face. "I just wanted to feel something other than that darkness. But, I can't even feel happy either. This just seemed . . . a way to get things out of inside me, a way to see something on the outside. I don't know if that makes sense to you."

There was a long silence. I could hear Tristan breathing. I felt like I was damaged goods. After a while, his voice, spoken softly, still echoed in the enclosed courtyard.

"How are you today?" he asked.

I thought about it for what seemed like a long time, but it was probably only a minute or two. "I think I'm okay. Things don't seem as dark. But I'm worried I won't be happy again, that I'll only ever feel like this. I want to be happy and feel happy and feel my smile and my laugh. I hate feeling like this."

"That's good that you want to be happy. Things are changing then," he said. "I was on anti-depressants a couple years ago. I saw a therapist after my grandfather died. Did a lot of talking with my parents too actually. They helped me sort out some things too. And the therapist got me off the pills too, they were messing me up. Cause of how I was feeling," Tristan explained. "But you know what I think?"

I looked at him. When I saw his earnest face I urged silently for him to continue.

"I think that this is heaven. Earth is heaven. We are so lucky to be here, living and breathing, experiencing anything we can think of that we want to do. And what we do here is what counts. And I think that when we die, we go someplace else, wherever we want to go. Whether it's blue skies and angels, or just a forest, I think we go where we want to. We make what we want out of our lives. We can't feel guilty all the time about things we have no control

over, things we couldn't or can't change. And life is precious. My Grandpa always said that. So we gotta live every moment. Because we might not be here tomorrow," I had watched Tristan as he spoke so passionately about his thoughts, his hands brushing through his hair in the parts he was sorting through as he said them. If he wasn't so serious and truthful and trying to help me out by sharing some of what he learned and thought I may have felt uncomfortable and laughed out of nervousness. But I didn't. Instead, I smiled lightly at him and nodded, letting him know I heard every word.

I turned and stared at one of the trees near us, a tree surrounded by a circle of benches that we were sitting on. There was a layer of snow on the empty branches. I sorted through what he said. Wondering where it all sat with my own thoughts about life and death. I could see his point of view. Parts of it I could easily agree to. Other parts, I wasn't too sure about. It gave me a lot to think about. I knew then that having someone tell me I could forgive myself meant everything, even though I wasn't sure I could . . . not yet anyway. I glanced up at the windows around us. They were empty of people; everyone was in class already.

Then I looked back at Tristan, ready to tell him that I didn't want him to get in trouble over my own issues. But I couldn't say it. I couldn't say it because I was actually really glad that he had stayed with me in my moment. That he tried to help me when most people would just sit there and say that they didn't know what to say, or say nothing at all.

I wasn't sure what I was doing until I was already doing it. I was leaning over, closer to Tristan. I kissed his cheek, near his lips. I stayed there a moment. Waiting. Waiting to see if Tristan would jump up and run. But he didn't. Instead, he turned towards me and kissed me quickly. His lips were soft. My heart was thumping loudly in my chest. I wondered if the kiss felt nice to him too, despite how brief it was; I wondered if he was thinking the same thing.

I tilted my head downward.

After a moment, Tristan spoke. "I didn't think you liked me like that. I hoped you would though. You've been practically ignoring me. Why now?"

I looked into his face, so much more wonderful looking now than before. I smiled. I smiled and, for the first time in a long while, I felt the smile inside me, like a small and bright flame getting stronger. A bright flame swelling in my stomach, in my chest, in my heart. I felt like crying because I had felt something, but I didn't. I kissed him quickly on the lips once more. "Carpe diem," I whispered, grinning from ear to ear, then jumped up from the bench and went toward a set of doors into the school. I waited for Tristan before I went inside. When he caught up with me, he was smiling. The brightest smile I had seen on him yet.

We went into music class together. We were both a half hour late. Everyone stared at us as we awkwardly took our seats and unpacked our instruments. We were both smiling silently.



Early December

Tristan and I were starting to be a bit more public about our affection, holding hands mostly in the hallways between classes. He came over one night, when Auntie Cynthia was

taking the boys out to dinner and to a new superhero movie. Mom and Dad were out for a celebratory dinner; Dad had gotten a pretty substantial promotion at work in the hospital. Ettie was going to a friend's house. I had invited Tristan, Laurel and Zoe over to watch *Labyrinth*, our annual thing in December.

A call to the house stopped me from prepping some snacks and munchies in the kitchen – in lieu of an actual supper. It was Laurel.

"Hi Hon," she said brightly. "Sorry, but I can't come over tonight. My parents are making me have quality family time tonight."

"Aww, that's too bad," I said, a sourpuss formed on my lips. "Can't get out of it?"

"Nah, they got kinda mad when I tried," she breathed out a huffy laugh.

"That's okay, we'll do something on the weekend instead," I said, fiddling with the phone cord on the wall.

A few minutes after talking with Laurel, the phone rang again.

"Hey there," Zoe's voice sounded low and dull. "Can't come over . . . I ate something bad; been on the toilet since after school."

"Oh, that's not good. Hope you're keeping hydrated," I said automatically. I thought *ew*. After a short pause, a thought came into my head. "Hey, should I call Tristan and cancel?"

"Nah, he's probably on his way already. He lives out on the other end of town, takes like twenty minutes to get here," Zoe explained. I heard a slight giggle on her end. Another thought popped into my head.

"Wait a minute, are you and Laurel bailing so I have to be alone with Tristan?!" I half yelled into the phone.

"Jamais!" she laughed. Apparently some lesson from her French class had sunk in. "Mais oui! Of course we are. You never want to be alone with him. Anyway, I actually do have to go to the bathroom now. I'll text you later."

"Super," I said flatly. "You better text me later!"

When Tristan finally arrived, I stood dumbly in the doorway, "Laurel and Zoe aren't coming over."

"Oh . . . does that mean I should go?" he asked and thumbed in the direction of his car. His face took on this puppy-dog look.

"No, no. Come in," I moved to the side, motioning for him to enter. "Did you still want to watch *Labyrinth*? It's a pretty girly movie."

"Absolutely, I've never seen it. Plus it'd be nice to see why you called the kitten I gave you Sir Didymus" he answered with a grin and took a seat on the couch. He looked down at my feet. "Nice moccasins."

I looked down. My moccasins nestled snugly on my feet: the beaded leaf and berry vamps were beautiful; the mink fur trim was dark, thick and warm; the leather was thick but supple.

"My Cocom made them for me last Christmas when my other pair was destroyed by Ralphie. He likes rabbits a bit too much. I got spoiled and she put mink on them for me instead of beaver fur," I explained with a smile.

"I'm just gonna bring in some snacks and stuff," I said on my way to the kitchen. *Oh my gosh, I'm alone with Tristan. Do I smell okay? My breath nice? My hair and clothes perfect?* There was no mirror in the kitchen so I patted down myself and straightened my knitted skirt. I was glad I had shaved my legs that morning—one less thing to worry about. I noticed that Didy's food bowl was nearing empty and I put in a scoop. His pale-grey tail slipped around my legs as I made my way back into the living room with the snacks and pop.

"One of my favourite parts is the song at the end when she's in this crazy place with gravity defying staircases. It looks like an Escher drawing. Bowie sings this crazy nice song," I blabbed as the movie began with the opening credits.

"David Bowie is in this?" Tristan laughed.

"Yeah, tight pants and punk 80s hair, I totally had a crush on him," I blurted without thinking. My cheeks reddened. *How could I just have told Tristan I had a crush on someone else? Well, it wasn't a real crush anyway.* I tried to sneak a good glance and looked his way. He was already staring at me, a small quirk of a crooked smile playing on his lips.

Half way through our movie, Dad called to tell me that they were all going to do some errands and then go to the movie theatre. He said that they wouldn't be home until after midnight.

"They all won't be back 'til like almost one o'clock in the morning. They're all going to dinner and a late show after some errands," I complained. Noticing the whine in my voice, I changed my tune. "That's okay though. I get to spend some more time with you." *Am I flirting?* Tristan responded by grinning and then took a large gulp of pop.

When my favourite part of the movie came, when the girl was in the masked ball, I sang along lightly to the song and forgot that Tristan was beside me.

"That's a nice song," his voice was suddenly loud. "I can see why you like it."

"Yeah, but it's also because of the whole scene. Sarah's in that big, poufy, pale pink, fancy dress. She's trying to find him in that weird masquerade. . . it's all really romantic, I think," I explained, still watching the movie.

"You're right, it kind of is, isn't it," Tristan added. I felt his eyes on me, and I dared to look. His gaze was intent; he was leaning further towards me until that space between us looked very small. I smiled and leaned towards him, our shoulders touching. We finished the movie like this, leaned against each other, shoulders touching, and his hand around mine.

"Wanna go for a ride? Get out? Grab some soup somewhere?" he asked me when the end credits started.

"Soup?" I laughed. "Yeah, soup actually sounds good. But is your car good to drive in the snow?"

"Very. My Dad just put some new winter tires on it for me after I nearly slid into his car coming down the hill towards the driveway," he laughed, hands and arms wildly gesturing the event. I couldn't help but laugh too.

It had snowed some more while we were inside; a good inch of snow covered everything. He cleaned off his windows, letting the car heat up while I waited inside. I snooped through his iPod that was plugged into the stereo. There certainly was a variety. He plopped into the front seat, stomping his boots on the floor and blew into his hands. His fingers were red from the cold.

We stopped into a popular late-night coffee shop and Tristan ordered and paid for two Italian Wedding Soups. The soup hit the spot, warming me from the inside and putting something inside me aside from cookies and popcorn and pop. Afterwards, we drove to a popular overlook. Turning off all the lights, leaving only the red glow of the stereo, the music softly playing in the background, we looked at the city and all of the small lights shining below and far away. The falling snow made a soft blanket over everything.

When some soft moaning sounds came from the stereo, which was also highly suggestive, I turned to Tristan and gave him a questioning look.

"I love Prince," he defended. "This is one of my favourite songs."

I had to agree, despite the suggestiveness and my own sudden shyness with Tristan because of it, it was a really good song. He put it on repeat and it played in the background as we sat in the car; the sexiness of it permeated the air. He sang along with it pretty well, except when his voice warbled at the higher notes that he couldn't quite reach. I was happy for the large armrest and shifter that separated the two front seats.

Absently, I played with the healing cut on my finger. I could feel a small ridge of the scar that was starting to form, the skin around it numbed of feeling. It tingled slightly. Suddenly, Tristan's hand was around mine, the skin of his fingers touching the healing scar. The tingling, perhaps warmed by his touch, subsided and vanished. I focused on the lights below that flowed toward the horizon, broken by the stretch of lake that sat there, snow-covered and frozen, lit by the moon, blurred by all of the falling snow. I tried to think of the happy things that were happening now. Tristan. My friends. My family—even though there were the not good things that have happened—we're together. Even Sir Didymus, the kitten that Tristan gave me, and its constant, thrumming purrs.

We were lightly bathed in the red-hued light of the car's dash and I watched Tristan's profile. The street lamp silhouetted his Roman nose and the light curls of his light brown hair on his forehead. He looked like a god—at least through my teenage eyes he did. I watched his slow, rhythmic breathing, his lean and muscled chest as it moved lightly up and down. His eyes were half-closed; it looked like he was concentrating, and I assumed he was listening intently to the music. From his hand around mine, I could feel his warmth spread over me. It comforted me, his

nearness, his warmth, and I relaxed into the seat, watching the snow fall. The city lights seemed to flicker and blink as the snow blocked the lights during its fall. It calmed me. All my worries, for the moment, were gone. I enjoyed the moment for as long as I could.

✱

Mid-December

The two-week long Christmas holiday break quickly approached and we were in the last week of school. There was tons of snow on the ground and it was super cold out. I loved it. Tristan was becoming a regular, hanging out with Laurel, Zoe and me. I wasn't actually sure if it bothered Laurel or Zoe with Tristan hanging out so much with us, but they didn't say anything. Plus, I didn't want to just stop seeing my best friends just because I was kind of dating a guy – I say 'kind of' because Tristan and I haven't really talked about the boyfriend-girlfriend thing. I think everyone was just happy for me. And I was happy for me too!

"Oh, are you going to keep seeing the counsellor?" Zoe asked. I had told her earlier that I didn't really want to see her anymore.

"I don't think so. I don't think she really helps me anymore. I can only talk so much. Yeah she's nice and I can talk about stuff, but she doesn't offer me anything new. I don't know. It just feels forced now. Like I'm feeling obligated to keep spilling my feelings to her. I'm not so comfortable with it anymore," I explained.

"Well, if you do decide you want to speak to someone else, you know we're always here for you," Laurel hugged me.

Then, the bell rang. Zoe, Cala, Laurel and Dillon went off to gym class. I was meeting with Ms. Makowski during my science class. Tristan promised to get any homework for me and said he'd wait for me outside music class.

In Ms. Makowski's office, I didn't hesitate too much about cancelling my weekly visits with her.

"Um. Yeah. I don't think I want to continue my visits," I said quietly.

"Oh," she could have been a little surprised, but she hid it well. "Is it okay if I ask why?"

I thought for a few moments and tried to piece together my answer. I opened my mouth a couple of times to start. Ms. Makowski waited there patiently, as if she didn't have a schedule packed with students coming in after me.

"I guess just that the talking isn't something that really helps me sort through things anymore. It probably helps other people. But it doesn't for me. I feel more comfortable telling things to other people, my family and friends, I guess. I'm writing a lot in a journal that Mom gave me. That helps me to get everything out of me, so it's not cooped inside and building up like a bottle of shaken pop that's ready to explode," I replied.

"That's fair. You're right. Sometimes people need more than talking to help get them through tough situations or feelings. I don't want you to feel like you have to keep coming here if

you don't want to. But if you really do need someone to talk to, even if it's just to get some things off your chest, you're always welcome to see me," she smiled serenely.

"Thanks, Ms. Makowski," I smiled back. We did talk for the rest of the class hour, mostly about my family and other things I was up to in my courses. It was nice to know Ms. Makowski didn't feel put off by my not wanting to visit her anymore—for the time being anyway. When I left, a few minutes before my music class was about to begin, I felt okay about it. I also texted Zoe and let her know I had finished breaking up with the counselor.

The next day, Laurel, Zoe and I were hanging around our lockers, doing the end-of-semester locker clean out. There were extra garbage bins lining the hallways today. Chatting about the new videos out this week, we stopped talking when a rumble of voices and feet became louder and louder as the movement of bodies made their way down the hallway towards us. It was Chuck. You could see him in the midst of a fight between a bunch of guys on the football team. We three looked at each other, making sure we were really seeing this take place. Chuck jumped and slid all over a football player. Chuck gripped him from behind, wrenching on the jock's arms. The other football players stood in a circle, jeering and yelling and urging their teammate to kick Chuck's ass. As the fighting pair moved around the hallway like a tumbling and screeching pair of fighting cats, a group of students emerged from the bathroom.

The next scene happened so quickly it was almost difficult to remember. The group of kids from the bathroom half stumbled into the pair who were fighting, inadvertently blocking and causing Chuck and the jock to separate from their entangled grips. The jock seemed like a giant, roaring with fury, as he stood there heaving and panting. And Chuck, well he took a quick dive behind a group of bystanders, upturned a near empty garbage can, and scuttled underneath it. As the jock stomped past, searching for Chuck, Chuck threw the garbage bin off of him and tackled the jock from behind, jumping on to his back. Just as the two began to throw fists, the principal came tearing down the hall with a few male teachers in his wake.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON OVER HERE!?" Mr. Bianci's voice boomed over the throng, his voice no longer the controlled calm, but a raging gale. The football player who was fighting Chuck gaped and took a step back. Chuck stood firmly, huffing from the exertion. "You two. In my office. NOW!" And off everyone went, the jock and his cohort, Chuck, and the principal with his wake of teachers. The hallway was quite suddenly very quiet and no one moved for a quite a long few seconds as everything took its time to register. And I suppose that's why I didn't hear her approaching me either, from behind.

Sacha looked worn down. I had been trying to avoid her. But, now, here she was. I couldn't avoid it any longer. I took a deep breath and mentally prepared myself for this discussion.

"I'm told I have to say something to you," she started, looking like a whole mix of exasperation, embarrassment, and, dare I say it, humility. Carol had her head down, staring at the floor or her shoes.

"Okay . . ." I waited for her to start. I felt Laurel's hand on my elbow, letting me know she and Zoe were staying.

"Can they like, just go?" Sacha asked, nodding toward Laurel and Zoe.

"No," I replied, my heart hammering in my chest. I wasn't going to give in. "Spit it out."

"I wanted to say that I'm sorry for what I said to you before. I had a lot going on. I took it out on you. But, we're not friends. I don't want to be your friend, ever. I'm just sorry I said those things," she said it, rushed, like a speech she wanted to finish quickly.

"I don't accept your apology," I said. Zoe huffed a laugh through her nose.

"But, you have to!" Sacha yelled. "I went through so much shit because of you and I have to talk to all these stupid people and I have detention every day during lunch and after school until I apologize to you and you have to accept it."

"Well too bad. I don't accept it. You shouldn't have been so nasty. There wasn't a need for it. There was no good reason for what you said to me in the first place! I don't know if you're racist or what, but you don't speak to people like that, ever, and especially when they haven't done anything to you to deserve anything like you did to me!" I was yelling, rushing through my words, furious, my throat becoming sore. I cried when I was furious and angry. I couldn't help it. But now, I tried not to cry. I was so furious.

"You're ruining my life, you fucking squaw!" Sacha bellowed, the tears flowing down her cheeks. She pushed past me, raced down the hallway. The art teacher popped her head out of her classroom door, probably having heard Sacha, and watched as Sacha ran past her, and, presumably, out of the school.

Carol was left standing in Sacha's storm of anger and pain. She was crying. It confused me.

"You got something else to say?" Laurel spat, stepping towards her.

"I didn't know she was going to say all those things to you," Carol said quietly. "I just tried to take her side. Especially after everything with her home-life and 'cause of school now."

"Why'd she do it though?" I asked Carol, not really expecting an answer but asking anyway.

"Her Dad's attitude is like that," Carol explained. "He even gets on my case cause my cousin is half South Korean. He's an asshole. And he hits Sacha too. All the time."

That surprised all of us. Tristan came up to us just then, having caught the end of that conversation.

"That doesn't give Sacha the right to act like she does though, you know?" Tristan said bluntly and calmly. I was very well aware of his hand on the small of my back. I could feel the heat of his hand through my flowing sequined jersey dress. I had a sudden image of Tristan's hand moving elsewhere. I turned to look at his face that had become serious from the conversation, his eyebrows furrowed slightly.

Carol turned to him, her eyes large and intent. "No. It doesn't. But I sure as shit think it explains a lot! And you guys don't give a shit about anyone but yourselves. You're just protecting the little Native girl all the time."

"Okay, whoa! That's enough there. You don't need to pretend that you're Sacha!" Zoe was now pointing her finger in Carol's face.

Carol snarled and said nothing. I figured she probably thought that this would end badly for her if she continued; she had already been in so much trouble. She pointed her finger in my face, opening her mouth as if she was going to say something and then closed it. She pushed past me and down the hallway the same way Sacha went.

"I don't think Sacha or Carol will ever change," Zoe said. I wasn't sure they would either.



At home that night, Auntie Cynthia sat silently at the kitchen table during supper and poked her fork at her food. If you knew her, as we all did, she had something to tell us, but was worried about it.

"Spit it out," Mom said suddenly and gently between forkfuls of mashed potatoes.

"I've put in a bid on a new house," Auntie said, smiling lightly. "If it goes through, and I'll be hearing from them tonight, I'll be moving in just after Christmas."

"But, you can't move!" Ettie blurted loudly and spilled some of her milk as she absently slammed it back onto the table.

I expected Auntie to try to console Ettie, but, instead, she laughed lightly. "It's just a few houses down the street."

"Oh," Ettie sighed with relief. "That's closer. That's good."

"I told you, I told you!" Wolf laughed at Ish, nudging him in the ribs as he ate. "And you thought I was lying!"

"Well, that's really good news!" Dad smiled. "I'll have my fingers crossed for you."

"Me too," I added, smiling honestly for the first time in a while. I was happy for Auntie Cynthia. Happy that she could move on again. Happy that, seeing as she was moving, at least she'd be closer to us all. I knew Ish would love that. He and Wolf had become very close since . . . since Saagate.

"Oh, speaking of news," my Dad added. "Mr. Bianci called me today . . . apparently you haven't forgiven Sacha. She's not in detention anymore, but things have apparently been difficult for her."

"Why should I forgive her? She's been such a nasty bitch to me, and she was all nasty today!" I yelled suddenly, angered that it seemed like my Dad was defending her.

"Hey, calm down there! I didn't mean it like that," Dad explained, clearly irritated by my own tone. I could tell he was trying to help, be compassionate. "I know what she's been like to you. Sometimes you have to just let things go and forgive and move on."

"Well, I don't want to just yet. Not until she's at least shown some ounce of being sorry," I explained, quieter this time.

"Okay, that's fair enough. But don't let it drag. She might just become nastier, you know," Dad added. "Plus, holding things in like that and not forgiving isn't easy on the soul."

After thinking about it for a moment, I agreed. "Yeah, okay. But, not 'til she says sorry and means it. I'll get Zoe to pass the message along to her sometime this week."

Conversation done, we all continued eating. As my Mom was dishing out servings of wild blueberry pie, my favourite by the way, a phone rang.

Auntie jumped from her chair and swooped up her cell phone from the counter. She answered it. A huge smile bloomed on her face and she turned to us all.

"I got it!" she cheered. Mom hugged her and so did my Dad. "Now, I just have to move everything."

"When do you move in?" I asked.

"December thirty-first," she smiled back.

"Just before New Year's!" Ettie smiled. "We could have a party there!"

Ish and Wolf did a unanimous 'yes' and Mom and Dad also agreed. New Year's party at Auntie's new house just a few houses down. I smiled widely.

"Can we invite our friends?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure!" Auntie smiled. "The more the merrier! But don't get too crazy and invite like thirty people."

I laughed. "No, just Zoe and Laurel and some other friends."

"Tristan included, right?" Mom asked rhetorically. She already knew that answer. I blushed deeply.

"Yes, and Tristan," I repeated, smiling.



I spent the rest of the week going through the motions of going from class to class, handing in little assignments, preparing myself mentally for a whole ton of work after Christmas when culminating activities were due and final exams were soon coming.

I also spent my time actively avoiding Sacha, although I knew that it was only a matter of time and guts when I had to actually listen to her and talk with her. Zoe had sent the message along, reporting back that Sacha had basically growled back at her in response. A few times I saw her dyed head bobbing in the hallways among the mass of other students and ducked away. It was one of those times of avoidance when I threw my locker shut and turned quickly to leave and hadn't looked where I was going and crashed into Tristan as he left the boys washroom.

"Hey beautiful," he exclaimed and gave me a hug.

"Hi," I said shyly. Unused to hearing someone call me beautiful, my immediate reaction was to blush. I hugged him back, feeling the broadness of his muscled back, feeling the muscles near his ribcage shift with his movements. I breathed in his slight muskiness, smelling the cinnamon gum on his breath as I moved to kiss him lightly on the lips.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of all this public affection?" he teased.

"I needed to have a happy moment and you just gave it to me," I smiled back, looking up into his face and the hero-dimpled-chin that was so perfect for him, and separating myself reluctantly from his body.

I rocked my flute case by my side. "Need your stuff for music class?"

"Yeah, let's swing by my locker on the way. I wanna grab some sheet music." He took my free hand, rubbing his thumb against my skin. "I've been working on a song for you."

"Really? What's it like?" I pressed myself lightly against his shoulder.

"That, my dear, is a surprise," he smiled and winked.

We took our seats in music, he in the back with the rowdy bunch and his guitar. I couldn't help but notice Erik in the rows behind me to the left. He looked at me, smiled and raised his hands in a plaintive, shrugging gesture. All forgiven and forgotten. I nodded and smiled back—after all, if it weren't for Erik, Tristan and I probably wouldn't have started seeing each other.

As the class played all of the songs in preparation for tonight's public performance, I made an effort to listen to Tristan's playing during my own breaks and long pauses in the music.

In the middle of class, Mr. Garrett decided to remind us about our last big assignment.

"I'm going to go over the instructions again for your culminating activity that's due at the end of third week in January. You all knew about this at the beginning of the school year, and I know I explained them to you a month ago, but it's crunch time and I'll explain again in case any of you have some last questions," Mr. Garrett explained. "Individually, or in pairs, you'll create a piece of music, a song, five minutes in length. You'll also hand in a report explaining why you chose a particular style of music and what influences, if any, you had while creating the piece of music. Think of the style of music, the tempo, themes or emotions you're intending to evoke. Think of telling a story through music, and think of the melody—you'll have to think about all this. If you're in pairs, you need to think about creating a song that can bring out the best parts of each instrument, and that doesn't mean that you should create the exact same notes for each instrument: create harmony. Put some thought into it," he paused to look around at the faces of all the students, looking for comprehension. "Make sure you also explain any particular parts of the piece of music that you were most fond of—refer to specific bars. Remember that you'll also have to present your song to the class! It's all in your handout—I've got extras, so please ask if you need another copy. I recommend over Christmas break that you all think through some of this, get as much done as you can because January will go by quickly. I know I don't need to

remind you that this is worth twenty percent of your total grade. By the end of class, I want you to tell me if you're going solo or in pairs," he held up a blue sheet of paper in the air. The sheet was filled with lines. "And print your names please. I can't decipher chicken scratch."

Working in pairs was always exciting as it usually meant that work could be divided, but it could also bring trouble when you couldn't agree with each other. It wasn't always easy. But when I turned to look at him and he gave me a huge smile, I knew that any worries I had were gone because Tristan and I would work together.

Tristan walked me home after school, leaving quickly so he could go home and eat something and get dressed for tonight's performance.

My stomach was roiling with nerves and I only had a bit of the chicken and dumplings that my Mom made for supper. When I finished, I ran up the stairs. I slipped on an empire style dress, the bodice was a white velvet and the body was black dupioni silk. We all had to wear white tops and black bottoms for our public music performances. When I couldn't find anything that I liked enough in the stores, Mom took me to the fabric store to choose my dress pattern and pick out the cloth, and she helped me make the dress over the last few nights. I was sitting on my bed, putting on makeup when I saw some excitement at the park entrance that was visible from my window.

Two young men, who looked very familiar, ran out of the park entrance and back into the bush. They were soon followed by a haggard and disheveled, crazed-looking woman who was screaming angrily. A man caught up with her, a stick raised in his hands. He swung it at her and missed. She turned; her fingers rose up like claws and she struck wildly out at the man. He stumbled backward from the attack, his shirt torn, blood seeping from the wounds. He swung again. This time, her head dropped swiftly to the ground, having been lopped off by what I now realized was an axe. But, the head wasn't dead. The head rolled around, its eyes moving, its mouth forming shapes. It let out a high-pitched screech so loud and long that I covered my ears.

I was already at my window, banging on the thin sheet of glass and yelling. Sir Didymus, who was sleeping on my pillow, startled at my noise and, with puffy fur and tail, raced from my room. I was frozen as I watched the scene. Bile rose into my mouth.

Cocom came bustling into my room, roused and worried by my noise. "What's going on?" she asked.

I pointed to the window, "Ohmygosh, this man . . . he, he cut off her head! But she's not dead!!"

Cocom came closer, patting me on the shoulder as she moved to lean over the bench seat and stared out of the window for a few seconds. She stood straight suddenly and looked at me carefully.

"It wasn't what you thought it was," she said, sitting on the bed next to me—I hadn't even realized I was sitting. "That's Rolling Head. She turned into a demon. She killed her husband. She chased after her children and tried to kill them too. I won't tell you the story tonight."

My heart thudded loudly in my chest, reverberating down to my hands and into the softness of the blanket on my bed. I opened my mouth to object, but thought better of it once I saw the set of Cocom's mouth.

"Been dreaming a lot lately?" she asked.

I was surprised, my mouth hanging open like a suckerfish.

"Ah. Well, that explains some," she continued. "Sometimes we see things we shouldn't."

"We?" I asked dumbly.

"It runs in the family, honey," she smiled lightly. "Now, don't worry about it for the moment . . . unless . . . well . . . just let me know if things come a bit too close."

She stood to leave, pressing something into my hand, "Just wanted to give you this for your big night tonight."

I looked into my open palm. It was an absolutely beautiful loom beaded choker with sparkling red beads, unbelievably reflective black beads, and faded white and finely shaped bones. The silver chain, although rough looking, was strong and shiny.

"It was my grandmother's. They're rubies and onyx and bone. Don't ask me how she got it all," Cocom smiled, took it from my hand, and clasped it around my neck. "Perfect." She smiled again and left my room quietly. I stood, moving toward my desk and in front of the mirror.

The beads shone and sparkled. I smiled, having quickly forgotten what I just saw outside my window.

I left my house, flute and music in tow, and met everyone in the music room at school an hour before the performance. As I joined my friends, they turned and stared, slack-jawed. I looked down at my satin dress, the bow at my ribcage still how I knotted it. I touched my styled hair. Nothing seemed out of place.

"What?!" I finally blurted, annoyed and exasperated.

Tristan stepped forward, smiling. He chortled a little, "You just look gorgeous, that's all."

When the time came, after everyone had warmed up and tuned their instruments, we took to the stage and prepared ourselves for a few hours of playing. We went through decades of music, from the 50s through to the 2000s. What was the best too, was for each decade we all broke out some kind of decoration and accessories. The 50s had fedora hats and headbands with bows in them. The 60s theme brought out bowl haircuts like the Beatles and thick brightly coloured headbands for the girls. The 70s had flowers in the girls' hair or with flower necklaces, and round glasses—there were some afro wigs snuck in by some of the boys too. When we hit the 80s, it was sparkled gloved hands or mesh gloves that went to the elbows and long beaded necklaces, and piano ties. The 90s brought up some foam baseball caps put on backwards, neon necklaces and headbands, and, of course, some mullet wigs worn mostly by the boys. For the

2000s we wore sunglasses. Into 2010s, we just brought ourselves with no additional accessories—well, maybe there were a few Lady GaGa wigs.

My family had stayed for the decades of music, then left right after, not staying for the solo or group performances.

In between the decades of music, there were some other performances, mostly by the choir and some drama students who did some skits and comedy shows. The surprise, which ended the night, happened when Tristan, Erik and a few of their other friends in music got up on stage.

"I didn't know they put together a band," I said absently to Laurel and Zoe who were sitting beside me in the back.

"Yeah, we know," Zoe smiled. "It's been a secret."

"A secret? Why a secret?" I asked.

"Wow, you're slow sometimes," Laurel teased. "Just listen, you'll find out."

And then I understood what they meant. But I didn't want to completely believe it, in that part of me that still doubted.

"We're *Thornfield Grove* and we're gonna play a few songs for all you good people," Tristan yelled into the mic. They all had leather jackets on. They looked good.

"Our first song is *Moves Like Jagger*," Erik yelled again, sending a lot of girls in the audience to stand up from their seats and move to the front, ready to dance. As they played, and oddly enough Erik was almost as high-pitched as the original singer of the song, somebody's little brother would also come on and off the stage doing Mic Jagger moves. By the time it was over, my stomach and sides hurt from laughing so much. But, Tristan's playing, his swagger and his movements, entranced me as he was so focused on his electric guitar.

"Such a good song!" I yelled over to Zoe who was on the other side of Laurel. At some point during the song Cala had sat beside Zoe.

"Oh, but that's not the surprise," she yelled back at me, winking.

"Is it the next one?" I asked, edging off my seat.

She laughed, "Nope."

As everyone finished clapping, Tristan and the band were talking quickly, preparing for their second song. Tristan, on the electric guitar made some quick string of notes; his fingers practically flying over the instrument's strings. Erik's voice cut in, "Sorry Mr. Garrett, we know you asked us not to play this song, but we love this song too much." Mr. Garrett laughed and he waved his arms in resignation. Tristan strung out the same chord of notes again and Erik made some guttural moaning noises into the mic.

"*This is it*," Erik began. "*It's time for you to go to the wire.*"

"Oh my gosh. This is why I had to hear that song like fifty times in a row in the car last month?" I laughed. I sat, entranced, as the band played on, stopping to breathe when Tristan joined in with Erik for parts of the chorus. Tristan's voice was deeper, richer, more raspy.

"Well, at least they're not wearing prom shirts from the 70s," Laurel laughed.

"Actually, I think that'd be hilarious," Zoe burst out, laughing loudly.

Laurel squealed. "You're so right!"

When the song was over, the band mates looked around at each other and Tristan moved up stage beside Erik. He had an acoustic guitar in his hands and a second mic was brought in and put in front of him.

"What's he going to sing?" I asked to no one. I could feel my cheeks burning, knowing now that he was singing a song for me—probably.

He began playing his guitar slowly, deep notes that reverberated throughout the gym and into my chest. The drummer did a soft, echoing ride on the hi-hat cymbals that was like deep wind chimes. A low thrumming came from the bass guitar. Lingering drum beats, and light piano keys underplayed the melody. I watched him intently, my eyes never straying from him as he began to sing, slow, deep notes. If you wanted to compare it to something, it was almost reminiscent of *Imagine Dragons*.

I first saw your eyes

Fathomless, drawing me in

I can't resist you

My sultry, sweet addition

Don't refuse me, my heart's yours

Your touch desired

Caressing, slow temptation

Don't tease me or leave

I beg, just bring me closer

Don't refuse me, my heart's yours

I'll follow you there

The ends of the earth, I go

Just let my heart in

My Siren, I live for you

Don't refuse me, my heart's yours

When the song ended everyone stood up and clapped. I sat, still stunned, and, contrary to my popular form, I wasn't embarrassed. Tristan, wonderful Tristan, wrote this song just for me. I was beaming.

I moved to the front and hugged Tristan, beaming and becoming a bit emo so that I had to whisper, "Thank you. It was so wonderful."

"I have to admit, Mrs. Deeley helped me fix it up, it's a form of Japanese love poetry called Tanka!" he beamed. "Well, technically the song is three Tankas put together."

"Sounds complicated. But it really was beautiful," I smiled and rewarded him with a kiss on the lips.

After everyone in music class cleaned up the gym and we had a follow-up chat from Mr. Garrett, we were all invited to Erik's house for a wrap-up party.

After a call to my house to let my parents know I'd be back later, Tristan drove us to Erik's. It had started to snow during the performance so that everything had been covered in a light layer of white. The snow sparkled like little diamonds as the headlights shone over it. He stopped at a hill that overlooked the city on the way, parking so that we could see the harbour and the lake and the peninsula where the Sleeping Giant slumbered.

"I just want to sit here for a minute," he said quietly. "My ears are ringing."

"Yeah, it was loud in there with everything," I agreed. "But, really, you were so great!"

It was retro ladies' night on the radio station Tristan tended to listen to most often and Annie Lennox's *Stay By Me* was playing softly in the background. Whether too depressing or mellow, or something else entirely, Tristan changed the station and some soft pop/hip-hop music came on with a bunch of whistling in it—I think the song was even called *Whistle*. He turned the volume down so low that you could only just hear the music.

Before bed, I wrote in my journal. I wrote something happy and positive. I even put a sparkly butterfly slicker on the page when I was done.

I went to sleep happy. It had been the first time in a long, long while.



He drew his finger down my cheek and I could feel the roughness of his skin. And, despite the brightness of the sun, I had the impression that his skin was very cool. He showed me the small feather that had stuck there. He asked me, "Who are you?"

I wiped the back of my hands on my wet cheeks, thinking about his question again. He wasn't just asking what my name was. I am a lot of things, I guess. I can be still and quiet. But I can also be unpredictable and all over the place and loud and angry. I am often affected by outside forces and people who help to guide me and protect me. Part of me will always remain

mysterious and unknown. I don't tell everything to everyone. I don't even know all of me yet. I smiled a little at my next thought: I am forever changing.

I looked up into his face.

I looked at the Trickster's face. Weesquachak. I knew I was dreaming and I knew who he was. I knew what he was. I knew to be wary. But, surely, there was no harm in telling him my name?

"Ozhaawashkwaa-Memengwaa nindizhinikaaz," I said my spirit name. Blue Butterfly is my name.

He nodded.

He stepped back and smiled then. He stood there. So still I didn't think he was moving. Then he looked sideways and waved his arm through the air towards the forest.

From the forest came thousands of them.

Butterflies.

So many butterflies.

They were all blue.

For a sudden, fleeting moment they almost frightened me. There were so many, a cloud of them, coming towards me.

They came around me, moving around me. My hair blew around my face there were so many. So many wings moving wind.

A small, blue one fluttered in front of my face.

So beautiful.

"Memengwaa-bimiigiwin," Weesquachak said suddenly, so clearly and so sharp. It was as if he knew what would happen next. In fact, I was sure that he did.

In one swift movement, the butterflies moved up from around me, thousands, moving around the sky above us and around the trees.

Then, like a time-lapse video, I watched as the butterflies moved away and laid eggs.

"Owaawano memengwaa," Weesquachak whispered from where he stood. I heard it as clearly as if he were standing next to me.

Everything still seemed like time was exponentially sped up, like a time-elapsd video. The caterpillars hatched from their eggs, thousands of them.

"Baashkaawe'o moos'," he whispered again, crouching near one of the trees, watching them closely, but never touching.

The caterpillars that came out moved around so quickly, growing as they did, becoming larger, colourful, some with lots of little hairs on their backs, some without.

"Maajiigi moos'," Weesquachak said, nodding at the movements on the ground.

The caterpillars then moved up into the trees. "Gashkiiwedgii'idizo moos'" I heard Trickster whisper, now he was beside me. And, in what seemed like only a few seconds, the caterpillars, the thousands of them, created cocoons on the branches. Looking at all of them, they seemed like thousands of tiny hanging lanterns, except without the light.

I turned to the Trickster then and smiled. It seemed like a gift, watching all of this. But what was the catch?

He looked at me.

"You are like these butterflies," he mouthed. He smiled that feral smile.

I thought about what he meant. I thought of what I had just seen. I pictured myself as a butterfly.

He looked over my shoulder. I turned.

Tristan was there. Smiling. Holding out his hand to me.

I felt myself move towards him, trying in vain to reach him.

"When it snowed, (then) sang the young Moose. Truly happy they were when it snowed: 'May more snow fall, may more snow fall!'" (from A Moose and His Offspring by Overholt and Callicott, 1982, p. 81).

Chapter 9

Snowflakes Coming Down

Mamaangadepo

It was Christmas day. Mom was already downstairs making dough for bread. I sniffed the air and I could smell the bread already. The smell of bread baking would fill the house. It made my mouth water just thinking about it. I smiled remembering the year Dad decided to make Christmas bread. He hadn't let the bread rise up enough so when it was in the oven the dough had overflowed over the sides of the bread pans, blackening the edges. We teased him every year for it, remembering that. The bread still had tasted good, especially because my Dad had made it. Cocom was frying bannock and we all made some sort of bannock and bacon or bannock and egg sandwich.

I was still in my fleece penguin pyjamas when I walked downstairs. I refilled Sir Didymus's water and food bowl and scooped out his poop from his litter box that was located in the closet of the mud room. After washing my hands thoroughly, I sat at the table and chowed down on some crepes and bacon. It was a breakfast feast. We all ate too much. Ish and Wolf were the most excited and they were already into their stockings, opening the little toys and bits of chocolate.

We were spoiled this year. Ettie got a laptop—she had been complaining since midterms about how she wanted her own computer for assignments and so she could work wherever she wanted—and a cell phone; it had unlimited text. Ish got a remote control helicopter and Wolf got a remote control car—they were only allowed to use them in the basement or in their own room. All of the grownups got some jewellery and watches. I got the one thing I asked for, but never thought I'd actually get: an iPad and a large amount gift card to buy all the movies and songs and games and audio books that I wanted. I was in heaven. I immediately set up my account from the family computer and started buying a few movies and some new songs and a couple of games – I was, by the way, in the mood for buying most of those things with a zombie theme.

It was around noon when I stared up from a zombie movie playing on my iPad. It had started snowing. Fat, fluffy, little clouds of snow. I loved it. It always seemed more like Christmas when it snowed on Christmas day. Then I saw them again. The little people. They were running in and out of that same bush in the front yard. I had looked at that bush before, didn't find anything unusual about it. I wondered if I really was just seeing things, despite what Cocom told me. I looked further down the snow covered street. I could see the park from here. The path that led around a bend to the other side of the park. A movement in the trees caught my attention, dark, moving side to side, as if someone were pacing. Then the figure walked and stood in the middle of the path. His long hair blew around his face. I couldn't see his face clearly, but I knew it was Trickster. He waved in my direction, beckoning me. Suddenly frightened, although I'm not sure why, I closed my curtains with one quick pull. Sitting there quietly for a few moments, maybe minutes, I heard Ish and Wolf run up the stairs.

"Mom said we could have some bread. It's ready!" he squealed and ran back down with Wolf at his heels.

Mom had just taken the bread out of the oven and we were all there like crows, hovering and waiting until the time was right to grab a couple of warm slices with butter. Mom had taken a couple of loaves and set them aside.

"Do not touch these ones. They're for supper," she warned with a smile and pointed at the warm, untouched loaves. They were like beacons, like the last cookie, like a puddle of water in a desert.

"Are Grandma Myrtie and Grandpa Eddie coming over tonight?" Ettie asked, hovering in the doorway of the fridge, looking for something. She came out with a juice box.

"They're coming up for New Year's; they're at Uncle Eddie's for Christmas this year," Dad explained, slapping on a slab of butter on the steaming bread.

"Is your brother coming up too?" Mom asked, doing the same to her bread.

"No, he has to work on the day after, pulling some overtime shifts at the mill," Dad went on, now gulping back some of his coffee.

After lunch and about a half hour messing around with the most difficult and hugest puzzle on earth, I trudged up the stairs to my room, having eaten so much at lunch that my steps were slow and heavy.

I was passing Ettie's room when I heard her strained voice, whispering angrily into the phone. I paused in her doorway.

"I can't even believe you're still on my case about it!" Ettie was definitely angry.

I hovered in her doorway a little too long, and when she ended the call abruptly she looked my way. I stood there dumbly.

"Where's Mom?" Ettie half yelled, her eyes were red-rimmed and her voice was raspy.

"They're all in the living room," I answered quickly and quietly, stepping abruptly out of her way as she shoved past me.

A long minute later, I made my way down the stairs. Ettie and Mom weren't in the living room. I sneaked along the back wall toward the kitchen. I stood by the sink and could hear their hushed voices.

Ettie sobbed between words, it really sounded like a mess and you had to really pay attention to understand any of it. "He s-said t-th-that he couldn't . . . he said he couldn't be with m-me anymore. That I – I don't spend enough *time* with him."

"Did you and Val . . . ?" Mom was nearly whispering.

Ettie was quiet. I couldn't hear what she said. But, Mom sighed loudly, her scared sigh. Mom was often quiet before she said no or before she reacted to things that upset her in some

way. She tended to think things through first. Her approach to surprising events was, for lack of a better word, gentle. Dad didn't even want us dating yet; I think most Dads would prefer to prolong the inevitable as long as they could. Although level headed, he was much more "logical" about things first, Dad might've just started yelling at Ettie if she told him. He's a Dad, a man, male—as if that would really explain things. Plus obviously, it was just easier to talk to Mom about female things.

"You . . . you were safe?" Mom asked quietly. I supposed Ettie answered her, but I didn't hear.

"Okay," Mom breathed out. After a short moment Ettie started sobbing again and I moved from the kitchen, back through the living room and up the stairs. I knew it was wrong to eavesdrop on a conversation like that. Sir Didymus was sprawled out on the top of the stairs, rolling around on his back.

"Oh, you silly Didy kitty," I said, scooping his floppy kitten body up in my arms and heading to my room. Grabbing the cordless phone in the hallway—its pair was in the kitchen—I called Laurel. I sat on my bed, laid Sir Didymus down on the bed in front of me, reached for the Furminator fur brush in my bedside table, and started brushing Sir Didymus's soft, white and wispy grey fur.

"Merry Christmas!" I yelled when she picked up. She giggled.

"Merry Christmas back! How's your super-duper snowy Christmas?" her voice hissed from the line.

"Good! Really great! I got an iPad!" I cheered.

"Ohmygosh!!!" she practically screamed. "I got one of those e-book tablets that the bookstore sells, I'm in heaven! *Mansfield Park* here I come!" I laughed at her excitement.

"Ohh, you'll never get this—" I quickly snapped my mouth shut. I had almost told Laurel what I think had happened to Ettie. Part of me wanted to share it with someone. But, I knew how Ettie would feel if she found out I told one of my friends her business: betrayed.

"'Ohh' what?" Laurel asked when I hadn't said anything.

"Oh, nothing. Mom just banished us from eating all of her fresh bread," I huffed a little laugh and absently petted Sir Didymus. "Oh, hey! You guys making Christmas dinner?" I asked her, flipping my iPad over and saw an inscription etched onto the back. I hadn't noticed it before.

"Nah, we're going over to my Uncle's house. He's making some hugeass turkey and a ham and all sorts of stuff. There's a big family reunion thing. Hey, hear from Zoe yet? She called me this morning. Her parents got her horse riding lessons!"

"No way," I was happily surprised and forgot about the etching as I put the iPad down on my bed. I thought I knew Zoe really well. I sure knew Laurel! "I didn't even know Zoe was interested in horses, let alone horseback riding."

"Well . . ." Laurel paused. "I think it has to do with Cala."

"What does Cala have to do with it?" I asked. I knew I was missing something huge.

"Cala's family lives on an old farm, well they don't farm anymore, but they have a few horses. Cala rides horses," Laurel explained, she sounded annoyed.

"Oh, I didn't know Zoe was spending time over at Cala's house."

"But Zoe didn't want to say anything yet 'til you were like paying attention to everything again."

"Oh," I said softly. "I don't care if she's hanging out with Cala. Or . . . did I do something to make Zoe mad?"

"Ohmygosh, Butter, she's not mad at you," Laurel's voice took on that tone, the one like she was talking to her six-year-old brother when he started crying and thought he did something bad. "It's not always about you anyway, you know," Laurel made an audible sigh. I could picture her rolling her eyes at me. But, still, I was clueless. "Zoe and Cala are dating. But, I'm not supposed to tell you, she wants to let you know herself, so don't even mention that I said anything, 'kay?"

"Kay," I repeated. "Wow. When'd she tell you?"

"Actually, just over the phone this morning. But she and Cala were hanging out a bit just before Christmas," Laurel said. "Oh, I gotta go, my Mom's yelling at me. We're leaving in like fifteen minutes. I'm preparing for all the mayhem."

I laughed a little. "Okay, have fun. Call me tomorrow?"

"Sure will, Chicky. Bring on the Boxing Day window shopping!" Laurel laughed and I heard the silence of the phone being hung up. I put the phone back into the receiver in the hallway. I stood there for a minute, processing everything that happened.

Ettie. Zoe. What should I feel? That dark cloud that was in me, I was sure, was pretty much gone. Yet it clouds back in once in a while, not lasting too long, but long enough. Ettie. She felt love for the first time. Then Val crushed her. He was an idiot. A cruel idiot. Zoe. Zoe was gay? I guess I'd wait for her phone call and find out for sure, let her tell me. As long as she's happy, that's all I cared. I would tell her that . . . if she asked.

It was just before supper when Zoe finally called. She sounded tense.

"Merry Christmas!" she spoke happily.

"Merry Christmas!" I said back, trying to sound chipper. "How has your day been?"

"Awesome! Get this, Mom made turducken!" she laughed hysterically for a minute. When I didn't say anything back aside from an *err* sound, she elaborated. "You know. A chicken stuffed in a duck stuffed in a turkey?"

"Holy cow," was my only response. "That's a creative use of fowl, isn't it?"

"Hah, yeah. But it actually tastes really good. Mom usually puts tons of spices in it and herbs and butter inside the turkey skin and she also makes all these side dishes. Totally yum." She paused while I laughed at the sound of it all. "Listen, um. I need to tell you something."

"Sure, tell away," I chirped, now in a good mood. That darkness was subsiding a bit.

"I already told Laurel . . . did she talk to you today?" Zoe's voice was low and quiet. It had an edge.

"Yeah, but we talked mostly about the stuff we got and us all going out tomorrow and whatever. She said you got horse riding lessons! That's pretty cool!" I sounded cherry, smiling so that it sounded like I was smiling, if that was even possible.

"Oh, okay. Nothing else?" she picked for information.

"Um . . ." I thought about telling her that Laurel spilled the beans, but thought otherwise at the last second. "Just that she was going out for dinner and stuff and her Mom was on a rampage so they didn't get there late." I huffed a short laugh.

"Okay. Um. Well. I . . . err. Well Cala, you know her, she's been eating lunch with us?"

"Yeah, of course I know Cala . . ."

"I'm kind of hanging out with her. Like, um, we're seeing each other. We're dating. Going out," she said it all in a rush, unsure about how to tell it to me. "I'm gay." She breathed out heavily, her breath causing a rush of loud air into the phone.

"Okay," I wasn't sure how else to tell her I was okay with it aside from saying Okay. I wasn't sure if she wanted me to say anything else. "You tell your Mom and Dad?"

"Yeah, they're okay with it and everything. They said they always figured. How annoying," Zoe sounded lighter all of a sudden.

"You're happy then? Happier telling people?" I asked.

"Oh. Um. Yeah. Definitely. I feel like I can be more myself. I don't have to like hide anymore, I guess," she said.

"Well, I'm glad you're happy. Sharing that stuff makes things easier in the long run." I spoke about myself here, thinking about how I shared my own stuff with Tristan, with Laurel and Zoe, with my Mom and Dad. "Oh hey, Laurel and I were going to the mall tomorrow, wanna come? Bring Cala too."

"Yeah, that'd be great! I'll call you and we can go just before lunch, eat at the mall," she sounded happy. I could hear her smiling.

I fiddled around on the iPad for the rest of the day, downloading a few vampire and zombie movies, playing some zombie games. I never gave any thought to my interest in those creatures. Maybe it was because of the worlds they were in. Worlds where people lived together not only for love, but also for survival. Worlds where, I would hope, most people helped each other out.

Before bed I went downstairs for some hot chocolate. Mom had made some from scratch and the pot was still on the stove. I waited for the thick concoction to re-heat in the microwave and wandered to the window at the back door of the kitchen. The back light was on. It had just snowed. There were footprints in the snow. They came from the house. I looked at the shoe rack. Ettie's and Cocom's snow boots were missing. I slid mine on, never minding the laces, and put on Dad's big parka.

I opened the back door, pushing it open even slower at the spot where it normally creaked. I saw the two toward the corner of the house. Ettie was kicking at the snow. Thrashing at it with her feet. She swore loudly and spit into it.

"Aanii-na," Cocom hushed. "Kick at the snow, and the snow will kick back at you."

"That makes no sense Cocom," Ettie spoke back. We never spoke back to Cocom, or to any of our Grandparents. We respected our Elders. Mom and Dad always told us to do that. We knew a lot at our ages already, so imagine what they knew now they were in their seventies! I thought about that sometimes, all the things they must know and have experienced during their lives.

"What you do, to another person, to nature, it comes back to you," Cocom explained. "You must respect all. From the manidoons, the little ladybug, to the tallest tree. We must show respect. And we must show respect to the snow too. Or, it could come back as a great storm."

I tucked my head back inside the door, took off the snow boots and coat, and took my cocoa from the microwave. It was perfectly warm. I brought it upstairs to my room and sat on the little ledge at my window, cupping the mug in my hands. It was so cliché, but I loved it. Now, out of habit, I stared down the street toward the park. I stared into the trees, wondering if I'd see *him* there.

I saw something. Someone.

I jammed the curtains together and jumped into my bed, iPad in hand, and distracted myself by watching a scary movie . . . I wasn't all too sure that it helped much.



"Darkness keeps you," he said. I noticed that it was not a question. He said it as a truth. "Everybody has those moments. It just can't be held on to for so long."

I felt myself hold my breath. The woods were cold and I could see my breath billowing from each slowly exhaled breath.

His long fingers, dirty fingernails, raw knuckles, gripped my forearm. I held still, not daring to pull it back. He stepped closer.

"I don't know how to let it all go, some of it just stays there. It's always there," I felt even more saddened by this reality that I was not truly happy yet. That I hadn't let the sadness go.

"A storm comes," he said and released his grip.

"Did you make it happen?" I asked.

He laughed, short and breathy. The laugh didn't reach his eyes and his smile faded. He gave his shoulders a slight shrug. "It just comes."

He paused, looking around, looking into the now snow-covered, ice-covered trees behind him.

He held out his hand to mine and put some objects into my palm. I could feel them there, cold and hard. I looked down to my closed fist, then up again.

He was gone.

But the snow continued to fall.

"The dreaded windigo is the most horrible creature in the lands of the Cree and Ojibwa Indians. Nothing strikes more terror in the hearts of the Anishinabek than the thoughts of windigo" (from The Windigo Spirit by Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 122).

Chapter 10

Waking from the Cold

Amadaji

In the morning, we woke to one of the worst snowstorms this winter. The roads were filled with slush and heavy, puffy snow. It came down like a torrential rainstorm, but without the lightening: Sheets of white. The clouds were so dark and grey, it seemed like it was near sunset. I couldn't help but think about what I heard Cocom tell Ettie last night about the snow; maybe it was just a coincidence. I couldn't help thinking about my last dream. I shuddered.

"Not hungry?" I was vaguely aware that Dad asked me a question.

"Oh, no. I had something late last night, kept me full. I'll just stick to some porridge and toast," I blanched, worried that I might have just given myself away, that Ettie or Cocom would know that I had been in the kitchen late last night when they were outside. I said nothing, but, instead, did an Ish and stuffed my face.

I called Laurel and Zoe after breakfast and suggested that they, dare I even have said it, come and walk the less than a block over to my house around 11 o'clock. After bribing them with some homemade bread and leftover Christmas-turkey pies, and some of my homemade hot chocolate, they agreed.

They came to the back door, shuddering in the falling snow. I let them in and they kicked their boots together, shaking their snow-covered coats before they hung them up. I ushered them into the kitchen, the warm food ready on the table. We chatted about everything and nothing while we ate. We talked about a new movie that came out that we all wanted to see, magical and romantic and with very charismatic lead actors. After a reminder from Dad to clean up our lunch dishes, we went up to my room.

From damp backpacks, they each pulled out an iPad.

"Welcome to the club," Laurel smiled.

"Yeah, and don't think I'm not extremely grateful for it either. I love my iPod though, don't get me wrong, but movies are way better to watch on the iPad," I laughed.

"What games are you playing?" Zoe asked as she picked up my iPad from my bed and started skimming through all the games.

"Well my plants have been having fun eating lots of zombies," I chuckled, Zoe and Laurel laughing and rolling their eyes at my current weird interest in zombies.

"Have you guys thought about the music assignment due in a few weeks?" I asked them. They were partners for the assignment, and it wouldn't surprise me if they were already half finished.

"Yeah, we've been poking at it for a bit. We're using the music programs on our computers to write it, makes it so much easier," Zoe explained.

"Yeah!" Laurel chimed in. "We're making it sound all pop-techno-esque. I think it sounds cool." I smiled at her excitement.

"What about you and Tristan?" Zoe asked.

"I have no clue," I said truthfully. "We haven't even talked about it other than that we want to do something a bit more classic and acoustic . . . flute and guitar."

"Well, there's lots of Alternative or 70s songs that sound great like that," Zoe offered. "My Dad has tons of records from the 70s if you two wanna come over and browse through some."

"That's a good idea. Thanks!" I gave her a bright smile.

*

That night I tried to ignore the wind and the snow outside. I was alone in my room—aside from Sir Didymus who was curled up and sleeping beside me—and adventuring through a new music app that I loaded onto my iPad. I was also texting and face-timing with Tristan as we poked around with a few ideas for our cumulative music assignment, humming together tunes and he writing down the brilliant strings of random notes that we created and hoped to string fluidly together. Outside, it was blowing fiercely now and the wind was making whistling noises around the window of my bedroom.

Ahead of me, and out of my direct line of sight, I saw something move near my open closet. I stayed still, hoping that it would just go away. But it didn't. The small thing crept closer, sneaking its way around my desk, past my door, at the side of my bedside table. Sir Didymus woke then, probably sensing my tenseness or my fear or both, and arched his back and hissed. I pet Sir Didymus on the head, trying to comfort him and hoped that he didn't move.

"It's okay Didy," I whispered. Despite my fear, I knew and felt that I shouldn't be afraid of the small creature sneaking through my room. I knew it was an Apa'chininiich. I remembered Cocom then. I remembered her telling me that they were not creatures of malice or fear. That these creatures were simply being mischievous. That to see one was a privilege.

I turned my head to the direction of my bedside table.

"Hello," I whispered.

Nothing happened.

"Booshoo," I whispered again.

I saw its head peer from around the table. Its brown leather clothing was crisp and clean. It raised its hand toward me. It pointed out the window.

I turned to look at the window. The moon was the only light outside. I thought it strange at the time.

I turned back to my bedside table. The Apa'chininiich was gone.

I picked up Sir Didymus and went to the window and looked outside. The moon really was the only light. All of the streetlamps were out.

Compelled, I went downstairs, and deposited Sir Didymus onto Ettie's lap. I felt like she needed some kitty love, even though I wasn't supposed to know anything about what happened to her and how she was probably hurting inside. Ettie smiled as she looked down at the kitten in her lap and started to pet his little furry head.

I moved toward the kitchen and smiled absently as I saw that everyone was in the living room and watching a comedy-horror movie about zombies. I moved into the kitchen, took a drink of water, then went to the mudroom and put on my winter coat and boots. Like a good and predictable dog that he was, Ralphie he was already beside my feet.

Under the pretense of taking Ralphie out for walk through the nearby park, I went into the cold darkness.

*

I walked around to the front of the house along the trail of shoveled snow that Dad had worked on this afternoon. Ralphie trotted alongside me until we hit the porch and he ventured into the yard, following another narrower shoveled path to a small, circled area Dad had dug just for Ralphie to use. The glowing light from the shaded living room window where everyone was watching the TV added a small comfort to the cold and my being alone. I sat still and shivering on the porch for a little while as Ralphie did his business.

For some reason, I decided to walk along the little path in the snow in the yard, at first thinking it would help to warm me up from the chill that seeped through my winter coat. As I neared the little dug out circle where Ralphie was now wandering around, I looked down the length of the street and into the woods at the park entrance. Small drifts of snow blew around the street like little wisps of cloud. Movements in the park's path made me focus my attention there. I stood transfixed. I was watching something incredible, frightening, and impossible.

I don't know how long I stood there, watching it as I slowly walked from the presumed safety of my yard and down the street, closer and closer to the woods. I don't know how long I was outside in the cold. I don't know how I got back home either, but I suddenly found myself in the mudroom of my kitchen. Ralphie was whining impatiently in the kitchen with a small patch of snow on his back. I shucked off my coat and boots and walked, stunned and silent, through the now empty and dark living room – when had everyone gone to bed?

I walked slowly up the stairs to my bedroom where everything looked as I had left it and dragged myself into my bed. I was vaguely aware of Sir Didymus who curled up beside me and let me fold my arm protectively over him.

Sleep had me quickly.



I stood there, at the entrance to the woods, the wind blowing wisps of snow around me and along the park's path. I followed it around the bend and up the hill.

Two boys ran past me, yelling and urging each other onward. The eldest stood suddenly and turned around, throwing something through the air behind him. The path shook violently, breaking and splitting. I jumped to one side, watching as it turned into a river. So transfixed on the changing of the ground, I hadn't seen the thing arrive on the other side until it shrieked. I looked up.

A head, black hair matted with blood and dirt and leaves. A female head, black-mouthed and open eyed, lay there. No. It rolled from side to side. Its mouth an open dark hole, screaming and hissing and wailing, speaking something. I was somehow aware that it didn't want me, that I was invisible to it. But I ran down along the path that was now a small river and, gasping for breath and tugging my coat closer around me, ended up in a clearing.

The clearing from my other dreams was no longer empty. There were homes, wigwams, standing in a circle. A large fire burned in the middle. Like a moth to a flame, I walked to the fire enchanted by its warmth I stood there and felt the heat of it seep through my coat and warm me.

Looking more carefully around me, I noticed that the camp was too quiet. I walked to the nearest wigwam and bent low and looked inside. There were people there lying down. But they weren't sleeping. They were only just breathing.

The creature went from wigwam to wigwam, from person to person, and dragging them to the center fire. They were now dead.

I stood in the centre of the village by the fire. Weesquachak stood there, opposite me, rubbing his arms.

To my horror, the creature threw the people—the corpses—into the fire and the charring smell of flesh and hair wafted into my nose. I gagged.

"Why?" I asked Weesquachak in Ojibwe.

His head lowered and he refused to look at me with those piercing, dark eyes. "The darkness and cold took them. The Windigo came," he finally replied.

The darkness.

The Windigo.

I remember being told that the darkness was keeping a hold over me. I shivered. I stared into the fire, watching the flames shift and move. Watching the colours of the flame, black to blues, reds and oranges and yellow. I looked back up across from me. Trickster was no longer there.

I backed up, looking around me. It all seemed too quiet and still. The wind no longer moved. The fire seemed to slow down.

It came for me. It came from my side. It flew at me. A gaping hole for its mouth. The teeth were serrated, sharp, fanged. The red eyes were large and bright. It reached for me with clawed hands. It felt colder than the air around me. It enveloped me, crushing me with its arms.

I couldn't scream. I couldn't say a word. The air escaped from my lungs in a ragged breath.

I felt its despair and darkness envelop me. It tried to take me over. I struggled.

No! No! No! I screamed in my head. You can't have me! You will not have me! I feel! I love! I want to live!

LIVE!

The word screamed in my head. I want to live!

The world seemed to get darker. I started to feel colder.

The Windigo was taking me over and I would become one of them. I would become one of them and I would kill as one of them. I would kill all whom I loved.

NO! NEVER! YOU CANNOT HAVE ME! I screamed in my head, the words forming in my mouth, but not making any sound.

I love my family. I don't cut my fingers anymore. I love my friends. I love Tristan! Yes! I did love him! I felt, I felt, I felt it!

I struggled against the creature's iron grip around me, kicking and flailing my arms at it, pushing against it. It seemed to falter against me. I struggled harder.

"I don't want to hurt anyone! I love them!" I finally screamed. "You cannot have me! You cannot make me one of you!"

It screamed words. Its voice was many, and it was harsh and cruel and cold. I could hear its voice in my head, insisting that I was in fact hurting, that I was turning cruel. But, in my heart, I knew I was changing. I knew that I was starting to feel and care and love again. It was wrong!

I felt the love I had for everyone wash through me, warming me from the inside. I cried for that love, letting it bloom inside my chest, letting it flow throughout my whole body, warming me. It was liquid hot down my spine, and into my arms and legs and abdomen.

"Leave! Leave! Leave!" I screamed at it, finally able to loosen its grip around me. It wailed, a scream so loud I thought my ears would burst.

"You can't have them! YOU CAN'T HAVE ME!" I screamed at it. I screamed, knowing that I wasn't just saying the words. I believed them. They were true. I did feel again. I felt love

and pain and desire and hope and fear and all of those other intricate and complicated feelings that weren't just darkness and numbness and despair.

I struggled so fiercely against the creature, thinking only of all those whom I loved and cherished.

I thought of Saagaate suddenly. How my guilt over her, over not telling her, over not warning her, had kept me in the hold of darkness for these past months.

"It wasn't my fault," I sobbed to no one. "She knew I loved her!"

"Yes," someone whispered behind me. It was a soft, consoling voice that had a slight rasp to it. I knew the voice. "I know you love me."

I knew it was her, I knew it was Saagaate. It was her voice. I could feel her behind me. Her hand was pressed against my back as the creature held me against it, crushing me into it, crushing my warmth out of me and devouring it with its cold body. It smelled of death and fear and darkness.

I felt Saagaate's love flow into me. I felt her forgiveness. I felt the truth of all that had happened and knew that I could not have prevented her from falling and dying.

"It was meant to be. You would have made no difference. I would have gone anyway," she whispered. But it held no comfort for me. I sobbed again. I felt the Windigo prey on that sob that escaped from my throat. It ate my sadness. It became stronger from it. It would consume me and turn me into one of them. No, I wouldn't let it!

I kicked again, screaming against it, pushing and punching and yelling. It crushed me harder, its arms like steel around my back. I felt my body become weaker. I knew then that it was feeding on me. It was feeding on my soul.

I thought only of that love again, of that pure and honest feeling, of that intense knowledge that I loved and was loved and that I loved myself.

I was loved. I was loved. I was loved. I thought the phrase over and over again.

I was not alone.

The arms around me suddenly let go and I fell to the ground and into the cold snow that surrounded what was left of the dying fire. The Windigo screeched and clawed in the air toward me, screaming, wailing.

"You will not have me!" I screamed at it, standing up on shaky knees. I dared it to come forward. I knew I would destroy the thing that was Windigo. "You will NOT have me!"

It screamed a final scream and turned and flew away, disappearing into the trees.

I looked around me in the near darkness. The embers from the fire were only dully glowing. I turned around slowly, expecting to see Saagaate standing there, expecting to be able to hug her.

Instead, I found myself on my knees, deep in the snow, in my front yard.



I woke up crying, sobbing onto my arm. I turned my head and focused on the closest thing in front of me. White. Snow. Darkness. I really was outside in my front yard. My fingers were numb from the cold. My hands were clammy. My tears were freezing on my face. I tried to push myself up. My arm slipped and my face landed in the snow.

Then. A hand.

Fingers softly touched my shoulder.

I looked up from the hand. Thin fingers, feminine hand, clean nails. She was wearing a black coat. I tried to focus my bleary eyes on the face of the woman.

"I was worried about you," she said. She held her hand out to me and I clasped it. "Oh! You're frozen!"

"I . . . don't . . . remember," I murmured. She pulled me up and rubbed down my arms in an attempt to warm them up. "Thank you."

She smiled. "I couldn't leave you out in the snow."

"I think I was sleep walking," I explained. "What's your name? Who are you?"

"Sister," she said.

I thought I heard her name wrong and, not wanting to ask it again and seem like more of a crazy person that I must've because she just found me sleeping outside in the snow, I just nodded and smiled. Her hair was long, black and pulled into a single ponytail that hung from the nape of her neck. Her eyes were bright. She looked concerned because her brow had a slight crinkle in it.

She nodded and smiled back then gestured with an arm that I walk back to the safety and warmth of my house.

My body ached and creaked as I came in through the kitchen. I crawled into bed and made sure to turn myself over and away from the window and the forest that was down the road. Sir Didymus, who was sleeping on my pillow near the headboard, grumbled a tired kitty grumble, stretched, walked over my hip and curled up in front of my chest. I took him in, trying to find some consolation and comfort as I petted his soft, warm fur. He yawned, his breath smelled of morning breath and cat food.

I laid there for a long while, thinking about what had happened. Was it just a dream? It felt so real. So goddamn real.

I had woken up outside. I was in the snow. Outside. Sleep walking? I had never done it before. I turned the phrases in my head until sleep took me over.

When I finally woke up and got out of bed, leaving Sir Didymus in a warm ball by my pillow, I decided to just put my hair into a ponytail for the morning until I showered. I grabbed a hair elastic off my bedside table and raised my arms. Deep throbs of pain shot up from my back and shoulders. I gasped, my knees going weak for a moment and I grabbed onto my dresser to hold myself up. After a few deep breaths, I took off my shirt, sat at my desk chair, and turned my back to the mirror. Deep, purple and black bruises lined my back like stripes. I gaped in horror at my back. I reached around, over my shoulder, and pressed on some of the bruise. It was tender and sore. It spread deep to the bone.

I took a long, hot shower and let the water beat down—thousands of tiny massaging and warm fingers pattering my back and the deeply coloured bruises.

I heard a rustling noise and saw Sir Didymus walking along the bathtub ledge. He was between the transparent plastic shower curtain that faced the inside of the tub and the cotton flower patterned shower curtain that faced the bathroom. He sat there, swatting the water droplets as they fell down the plastic curtain and then stayed there until I turned the water off. I decided that Sir Didymus was a bit strange or perhaps protective. I loved that cat.

"Songs were the utterances of the soul . . . Songs were poems chanted; they could be praises sung; they could be prayers uplifted to the spirit. Most were of a personal nature composed by an individual on the occasion of a dream, a moving event, a powerful feeling" (from Ojibwe Heritage by Basil Johnston, 1994, p. 148).

Chapter 11

Hopeful

Ahpanemo

A few days before New Year's, we had all helped to pack up Auntie Cynthia's old house. It was hard and the days felt so long – packing isn't nearly as exciting as you think it may be, but I liked wrapping up all her knickknacks as if they were Christmas presents. My back was healing quickly and it didn't hurt so much to move my arms around. The pain subsided as I continued to work.

When we got to the last room in the one-story house, Saagaate's had been the hardest and the slowest. We were all in there, helping to gently pack things. Ettie was given a lot of Saagaate's clothes and jewellery and some of her childhood toys that they had played with together. Wolf took some of her toys as well, along with a dark, polished stone and Paua shell necklace that he and Saagaate had picked out and bought for her on a road trip that she and Auntie and Wolf had taken to British Columbia two summers ago. In Saagaate's closet, Auntie had pulled out a long shoebox and opened it. Inside were loomed bracelets, completed and with leather backings. Each had a piece of tape stuck to the underside. Auntie held out each, whispering the names to herself.

Wolf

Mom

Aunt Ethlynn

Uncle Donal

Ish

Ettie

Cocou

Grandpa Benny

"She must have been working on them for months," Auntie Cynthia said quietly. "I had no idea."

"They must've been Christmas presents," Mom guessed. We all thought about the timeline of events.

Wolf took the box and pulled out an overturned and incomplete loom. The loom was strung with an unfinished piece of beadwork. The strings were still wrapped over the spiraled wire. The wide beaded piece was more than half finished. On it, were blue butterflies, so delicately designed, so lifelike. I hoped it had been meant for me.

"It's not finished," Wolf said the obvious.

"I could finish it," I offered, reaching my hand out for the loom then taking it back a bit. Suddenly, I was worried that I was presumptuous in thinking that Auntie would want to hand over such a treasure; a treasure of something that Saagaate had been working on. I looked to her, but she was focused on the beadwork bracelets.

Ish leaned in to Wolf and whispered something in his ear. Wolf nodded slightly and tugged on his Mom's sleeve. "Can we hand them out?"

"What?" Auntie Cynthia asked, perplexed. After a moment, her eyes widened and her brows rose up. "Oh!"

"You don't need to," Mom said, putting her hand on Auntie's arm. "It's okay if you don't. We all understand."

"No. No. She made them for all of you," Auntie nearly whispered. She nudged Wolf and he handed the unfinished beading loom into my still outstretched hand; I took it gently. I passed my fingers over the lightly strung beads and along the vertical threads. It reminded me of a guitar. I suddenly thought of Tristan. I pushed the thought aside.

I watched as Mom helped Auntie tie her bracelet onto her wrist. It sat there, fitted perfectly, a swirling design of purples and blues and gold. They were Auntie's favourite colours.

Everyone, except me, put on the bracelets that Saagaate had made. Although I couldn't wear mine, I looked forward to finishing what she had started for me.



On New Year's Eve, we all woke up early to help Auntie move some of her smaller things into her new house. A moving truck came around mid-morning to deliver all of the big furniture and everything else we didn't bring in ourselves. We took everything out of the boxes and put them into their places throughout the house. I felt alive. I was in pain and everything hurt as I moved, but I was alive. I was myself again. More myself than I had been in a long time anyway. I found myself smiling randomly during the painful movements of unpacking dishware and putting them into the cupboards.

By mid-afternoon, the downstairs rooms had all been finished. The furniture having arrived, we arranged everything in the living room as Auntie wanted it.

Just in time, Grandpa Edmund and Grandma Myrtie came in through the door, luggage in tow.

"We went to the wrong house!" Grandpa Ed ranted. "Some little brat started swearing at us to stop ringing the doorbell because she was trying to sleep! Sleep! It's damn near two o'clock in the afternoon!"

"Sorry, Dad," Dad said. "Here, let me bring your bags upstairs. We've got a bed set up for you and Mom up there."

While Dad and Grandpa Ed were talking, Grandma Myrtie squeezed Ish so tight he wheezed. Then, Ettie and I gave Grandma Myrtie and Grandpa Ed big hugs too.

I called Zoe and Laurel and Tristan. Zoe and Laurel were bringing Cala and Dillon. Tristan was bringing Erik and Nick. I actually didn't mind that much that Tristan was bringing Erik. I was really over Erik. Ettie was bringing some friends from school, and Ish and Wolf were content with just staying up late in Ish's new room watching movies on his little Batman TV and the matching DVD player.

While we waited for our friends to arrive, Ettie and I decorated Auntie's house with twinkle lights and silver balloons and white and silver streamers. Grandpa Ed and Grandma Myrtie were napping until supper. I didn't really blame them. Driving four hours through the snow must be stressful. But Ettie and I turned an iPod stereo on loud, sending pop beats thumping through the house.

"I know you heard me and Mom talking that night," Ettie suddenly blurted as we were setting the table.

"Sorry . . . I wasn't planning on hearing it . . . I went into the kitchen and happened to hear you guys outside . . . I'm sorry about the phone bit too . . ." I explained, worried that there would be a torrential spitting of curses and accusations and lectures from Ettie. But, what she said next surprised me the most.

"I'm glad you overheard . . . I miss having someone to talk with . . . I can tell you things, can't I? You're not going to go and tattle to Mom and Dad?" she said, placing the forks and spoons and knives next to the plates all neatly lined up.

"Promise," I said quietly. It was like an honour, like a torch being passed on. Ettie, who had always kept everything from me, was willing to share. I said nothing, quiet as a mouse, not wanting to disturb her, not wanting to scare a skittish creature. That's what it felt like. I waited for Ettie to continue, but she added nothing more.

Mom and Auntie came in just then and placed veggie and fruit plates and dip on the table.

"Next up: mini egg rolls and gyoza!" Mom smiled.

"And spanikopita and warmed lima beans in tomatoes," Auntie added. "Yummy!"

Ettie and I laughed as the two went back toward the kitchen, hip-checking each other lightly as they passed through the entryway.

"As long as there's Doritos, I'm happy," Ettie added to the air.

I laughed. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure Mom bought some. Cheetos too . . . mmmm Cheetos."

Ettie chuckled.

"Val's a cruel asshole," I said suddenly, not catching myself before it left my lips in a bumbled blurt.

Ettie turned her eyes towards me, frowning slightly, like she was judging me—as she so often seemed to do.

I'm not teasing. I'm on your side. Why can't you see it?

"His best friend has been calling me . . . Saagaate's friend . . ." Ettie let the thought hang in the air. It took me a few breaths to realize what she was actually saying.

"Paul?" I whispered, letting the question hang there in case Ettie wouldn't tell me who.

"Yeah. We've been talking for a while now. Nothing serious. He's just been a friend. But . . . I really like him. I know him better than I ever did Val," she tugged on the table cloth, straightening out the gathers in the corner. Mom and Auntie came in and put down bowls of chips—Doritos and Cheetos included—on the coffee table in front of the TV. I skipped over, grabbed a few Cheetos. Ettie sidled up beside me and grabbed some Doritos. After licking off the seasoning and finally crunching down on the chip, she put her hand out to me, palm up. I looked at it quizzically. *Why was I so slow to get things sometimes?* Then, put one of my Cheetos in her hand.

"You know, there's a whole bowl right there?" I said, smiling.

"I just wanted one of yours!" she laughed and stuck out her tongue at me. "Oh hey. Apparently Val has the mumps, so he's been stuck inside his house for all of Christmas and will be for New Year's and will probably miss the first week of school."

"Mumps?" I was incredulous and suddenly felt a pang of sympathy for the boy who hurt my sister's heart. "That's kind of serious, isn't it? Not to mention he's probably going crazy being alone for so long like that. Then again, maybe him being alone is his punishment."

Ettie laughed. "Maybe. Being alone is probably just good for him right now. He's been such a dick. Besides, Paul told me that the doctor said Val will be just fine. They're not really worried that he'll become sterile. Or maybe that's what Val's parents are just telling him so he won't worry. I don't really know. Don't really want to know. I'm done with him, over it, kaput."

"Sterile? . . . Oh, being able to have babies," I asked and answered myself. I thought about Val's loneliness . . . about him breaking up with Ettie. I thought about how everything you do comes back to you. I couldn't help but laugh a little at Val's solitude though. "He's probably being such a baby about being cooped up in his room."

"I know. It's kind of a nice thought, no partying for him this year!" Ettie smiled. "I invited Paul over though."

"Oh!" I was a bit stunned. "Is um . . . you . . . Auntie . . . um . . . everyone good with all that?"

"Auntie's glad I'm finally starting to be happy again. It's been really hard," Ettie and I were sitting on the couch now. Cocom and Grandpa Benny would be walking over later from our house. All this activity and stuff was too loud for them it seemed. Plus Ish and Wolf are just wild and totally loud all the time. I didn't blame the grandparents for wanting some peace and quiet for a while. We could hear Ish and Wolf playing upstairs in Wolf's new room. Their jumping and running stomps echoed in the ceiling. "Mom gave me a book to write in . . . I've been putting everything in it . . . a lot of hate stuff about Val too." Her small smile was a little grim.

I never knew. Part of me wanted the book Mom had given me to be just for me. But that wouldn't have been fair, when I thought back on it. Of course Ettie was hurting and in pain. Of course Mom would find something to help her too. When I thought about it some more, I thought that it was a nice thing to have in common. That we were both writing about the things that hurt us, things that made us happy. It was a place to vent and remove all of those things from us that were so ugly and dark. I didn't tell Ettie I had a book too.

"That's a good thing, putting all of that down. Getting it out of your system," I said. Ettie gave me a knowing look and just nodded.

Cocom and Grandpa Benny came in around three o'clock and comfortably settled themselves into the couches and set to watch some old Western movie that was playing on TV.

"Do you want thomthing to drink?" Ish asked with an audible lisp. His two front teeth had fallen out this week and he spent a lot of time sticking his tongue through the gap that was now there. He reminded me of Chuck. I grinned.

"Miigwech, my grandson," Cocom said. "Some tea would be nice."

"Nah, no tea for me! I want to feel my heart racing! I'd love some coffee!" Grandpa Benny chuckled.

"Does that fireplace over on the other wall work?" Grandpa suddenly asked Ettie who was sitting beside her.

"Oh! I hadn't really thought of it. I'll go ask Auntie," Ettie said, getting up and walking quickly into the kitchen.

"So, our child at heart, are your friends coming over?" Cocom asked me. We saw Auntie emerge from the kitchen and run upstairs where Dad was still putting together all the beds and other furniture.

"Yeah! Laurel and Zoe and Tristan, and another couple of people," I explained to Cocom as she had already turned her head and was facing the dust clouds billowing all over a dusty road in the movie. Auntie and Dad came back down: Auntie went back in the kitchen, and Dad put on his coat and boots and went out the front door.

"Ah, good, that's good, it'll be a nice, big party!" Cocom smiled then put her full attention on her movie just as Ish came back into the room with two steaming mugs. Wolf

bounded down the stairs then, waving two brightly coloured action figures in his hands, insisting that Ish come back up. The pair bolted back up the stairs. Dad came in just after with an armful of wood. He took the small pile to the back wall and began to light the fire. It quickly sparked to life and we soon heard the crackle and spitting of flame.

I settled in to watch the Western and was snuggled against Grandpa Ed when the doorbell rang. He nudged me and wiggled his eyebrows.

Tristan was at the door, a bouquet of flowers wrapped against the cold was held in one of his hands. I beamed and unwrapped the package. It was a bouquet of red and white striated tulips—my favourite flower. Everyone inside had at least the sense not to comment on it, or I would've turned beet red and got all shy in front of Tristan, but that didn't stop them from giving each other and myself that knowing and teasing look of a young couple in love. Love. That really was what I felt for Tristan. My dream . . . it made me certain of it.

"Thanks . . . I'll just put these in water, I'll be right back," I said, smiling and, I'm sure, blushing.

When I entered the kitchen, both Mom and Auntie turned around and made ooo and ahh noises. I beamed. Without having to ask, Auntie handed me a vase from under the cupboard and I took a few minutes to fill it with water, trim the stems and arrange them all in the vase. Entering the living room again, I put the vase in the middle of the dinner table, and was rewarded with a sweet smile from Tristan.

I took Tristan's hand and led him upstairs. Dad grunted a loud and audible grunt from the armchair and I waved my arm at him, and mouthed "don't worry."

I brought him up to the attic, which was more like a bonus room in the house with a line of wide bench seats that were probably also meant to be day beds, lined up along one slanted wall with windows. Grabbing a couple of sleeping bags stored in a corner of the room, we opened them up and spread them onto the bench for comfort. He slung his backpack off of his shoulders, his arm disappearing into the bag, and pulled out some blank sheet music. He unfolded the sheets onto his lap. The top page was partially filled in.

"I've been humming a tune for the last couple of days. I thought we could use it somewhere in our music assignment," he explained. "Maybe we could work on the song today?"

He hummed the tune and I tried to hum it back. Apparently being on key wasn't something that I picked up quickly. We worked on it for a couple of hours. Afterwards, we had a couple of music sheets filled in. It was a good start.

"It's like a mix of a couple of styles isn't it. Like that dreamy stuff from that maze movie of yours, and some of my alternative stuff," he talked on. "Here, let's put what we have so far on the music app." He pulled out his Dad's iPad, opened up a music-writing app, and started a new file for our song. We spent another half an hour entering everything in. When he finished the last couple of bars, I took the iPad from his hands, being careful not to drop it, and pressed play.

So far it was a wonderful melody. It was a lot like what he described, and there was also a sense of urgency within it as well. It wasn't just the tones of the simulated flute, languorous

and delicate and twinkly; it was also the feisty and spirited and passionate electric guitar in the background that made me suddenly feel like I was echoing those feelings. It ended abruptly and I was left with a feeling of wanting more.

"Yeah, see, it needs more. It also needs an ending," he explained and brushed back his soft, brown, wavy hair from his eyes.

"It sounds wonderful though, so far. I love it," I turned to him and smiled. I felt myself feel suddenly vulnerable. I hid nothing from him. I had told him everything. Should I tell him of the dreams? Or were they meant to be private? "I'd like to add something to it though, another instrument."

So, I explained to him what I wanted to do in some sections and was thrilled when he was on board.

As we worked on the song some more, we took a little break. We lay down on our backs on the floor. His head turned, he stared at me. Then, in a movement so quick but so gentle, he got up on his elbow and leaned over me. He kissed me then. Soft at first, then more urgent. His breath was warm. I pushed myself into him, the iPad forgotten on the bed between us. I felt the light crush of his weight on top of me. I could kiss him forever.

"Waitwaitwait," I said in one quick breath, pressing against his lean chest. "Someone might come up and see."

He scoffed. "Nobody's coming up here, Butter. Everyone's downstairs doing other things and being busy."

It didn't take much convincing, and I knew that my weakness really was with him. I was right back to kissing him, right back to being excited with him, back to feeling his heat mixing with mine. Our urgencies intertwined until all that I felt were deep tingling sensations along my spine and abdomen and the feeling of his lips on mine. We kissed for some time, until my lips were feeling swollen and I felt like I needed something to drink. I dipped my head, my eyes closed, and I felt my racing heart beat slower into its regular rhythm like a metronome swooping side-to-side, ticking away.

He hugged me gently then, but the pressure of his arms on my shoulders sent the bruises screaming with sharp stabs of pain. I couldn't help but gasp.

"What's wrong?" he asked, frowning, his hands exploring my back and shoulders. His fingers pressed on the bruises again and I flinched.

"They're bruises . . ." I said quietly. The rest came out in a near stammered breath. "And, honestly, I can't really explain how I got them . . . I had this horrible dream . . . it felt like more than that though . . . but, when I woke up, I had the bruises. I would've only got from the dream. I know it doesn't make any sense, but I didn't do anything else to get the bruises. I didn't fall, I certainly didn't get into a fight."

"Let me see," he asked gently, already starting to lift up the bottom of my sweater. I slipped it off of my head and shifted sideways onto the bed, tilting my shoulders toward him. "It looks like a bunch of bands across your back. They're more yellow-brownish now."

"Yeah . . . it looks strange. But they're healing pretty quickly. The dream was a few days ago," I explained, tugging my sweater back on over my head.

"Night terrors or something?" he asked. He was curious about it. I couldn't blame him.

"I have no clue," I said honestly.

"Do you get them a lot?" he asked then, holding my hands in his own. His hands were strong and warm.

"Not a whole lot. But I've been getting them since—," I cleared my tightening throat. "Since before Saagaate died, since school started. You were even in one."

"Oh yeah?" his pupils dilated, becoming sparkly. He smiled, and I knew he was trying to lighten the atmosphere in the room. "What'd I do?"

"Nothing like what you're thinking. You're bad," I couldn't help but laugh. He always made me laugh. He always knew when I needed to change a subject. He kissed me for a moment longer than we headed downstairs, just in time for the rest of our friends to ring the doorbell.

I was glad I put on my simple sequin dress. Laurel, as usual, was dressed to the nines in a beautiful short lace dress that had a wide skirt. Hooked onto Laurel was Dillon, dressed in casual jeans and a blue dress shirt. Zoe had on black satin pants and a beaded tank. Cala had on a pretty yellow silk dress. What surprised me most was seeing Nick, Paul, and Erik with a familiar girl dressed in a 50s style dress come in after them.

"That's Erik's girlfriend, Katie. I think she's in your English class?" Tristan whispered.

"Um . . ." I frowned a little at him. "Yeah. It's okay."

Tristan leaned in close and whispered in my ear, his breath brushed softly onto my neck. "I have some champagne. My parents bought it for me as a New Year's gift. I've decided to be selfish and share it only with you. I stashed it in a snow bank outside to keep it cold," he flashed me a charming smile that brought out the dimples in his cheeks. Between those and the dimple in his chin, he was dimples all over.

"You're lucky you're cute," I teased him and laughed.

Midnight came, and we all had feasted on all of the finger foods and warm, baked munchies Mom and Auntie had made that afternoon. I had never thought I'd still be spending New Years with my family. I always assumed I'd be out somewhere else with friends partying it up. I was having fun nonetheless. We watched the celebrations go off on the TV screen and heard the little pops and pows and whistles of small fireworks going off in people's yards around the neighbourhood.

Ettie and Paul disappeared somewhere in Auntie's house—I tried not to think about what might be happening with them. Mom and Dad, Auntie, of course, and Cocom and Grandpa were content to hang around the living room, drinking champagne, laughing, and telling stories. Ish and Wolf were asleep on a bunch of loose pillows in front of the fire—they hadn't made it to midnight and we could hear their soft, rhythmic snores throughout the living room. But my friends and my Tristan and I walked past the few houses, shuddering and holding our coats tight, to my house. We all threw our coats into the mudroom at the back of the house, and kicked off the snow from our boots. I started boiling water in the kettle to make some hot chocolate.

"Be right back!" Tristan yelled from the front door.

"Hey, there's chips and stuff in the cupboard and some dip in the fridge," I directed. Laurel and Zoe handled those two things. They were in my house enough to know where everything was usually kept. Tristan got some mugs ready as I took out the packets of hot cocoa and dumped them into the mugs. Cala and Dillon sat at the table, near strangers in a house everyone else in the group had been so used to visiting and eating in and laughing in and living in. When the water boiled, I poured the water into each of the mugs and we all took our steaming drinks and the chips and dip into the living room.

We put on a horror movie with ghosts and demons in it. I gripped Tristan's hand tightly and closed my eyes to the parts that I felt were just too scary and might give me nightmares—I had enough on my own and didn't need a horror movie to add to them. Halfway through the movie I got up to change into some flannel PJ bottoms, and, as I was walking up the stairs, I paused on a step and saw my group of friends. They were, aside from Tristan who was already getting up, all hugged against each other. All couples. I couldn't help but smile. All my friends were happy and, I presumed, all hopelessly in those puppy dog love stages. I thought about my love for Tristan. Yes I was always excited to be with him and around him, but I thought it was more than just puppy dog love. It felt deeper now, and that excited passion had heated and melted and settled into my bones. He saw me staring at him, took it as a come-hither sign, and casually left his seat on the couch and followed me up the stairs to my bedroom. Nobody noticed, but they'd notice when we didn't come back soon, or certainly, if we came back at the same time. It wouldn't be a bathroom break.

I took my favourite pair of flannel PJ bottoms with cats—surprise, surprise—all over them, and sat at my window seat. It was snowing outside again. Puffy snow that fell slowly to the ground. Sir Didymus was curled in a corner of the window seat, sleeping. His soft, rhythmic breathing even made me feel relaxed. I gave him a gentle pet on his side, earning a soft kitten groan as he creaked open his eyes, stretched his front paws at me, his paws brushing against my arm as he did so. He groggily stood up and walked onto my lap and curled back up again. Tristan was sitting beside me and chuckled.

"You two seem very attached," he smiled and reached across me to pet Sir Didymus. Sir Didymus groaned a little groan again and, when Tristan had his fill of kitten pets, Sir Didymus stretched again, his little toes stretching out too, and fell quickly back asleep.

"He's the best kitten. He's really gentle and cute and cuddly. He's really clingy with me, curls up in my lap all the time, and he purrs really loudly. I love the sound of his purr. He is the

best gift I've ever got," I replied. "But he's a bit of a peeping tom. He likes to watch me have a shower."

"What?" Tristan laughed. "Well I knew he'd be a great cat, pervert and all. I could feel it in my bones!" Tristan congratulated himself.

"Thanks again anyway," I smiled back. "Hey, we should finish that song in the next couple of days, I want to have more of a break before school starts again."

He teased me, nodding like a bobble head. "Sounds like a good idea."

I leaned in towards him and kissed gently at first, then echoed his intensity. Our lips pressed hard, and I felt that intense vibration awaken in me again. My intensity was matched by his own.

After some long moments, Tristan broke from the kiss, leapt off of the bed and ran down the stairs. After a short minute I could hear him running up the stairs. He sidled into the room, champagne bottle and two mugs in his hands. He popped the cork and poured us some champagne.

It was cold and fizzy and tasted gently sweet.

"This is really good," I smiled.

"Only the best for you," he cheesed a compliment.

We finished off the bottle between us.

I felt buzzed and light headed from the champagne.

The best part of the night was when I fell asleep. I was lying next to him on my bed with Sir Didymus curled between us. For the first time in a long while, I was hopeful for the future. In the pit of my stomach I was also frightened that this would end someday.

"What shall happen to one of you will also happen to the other. Each of you will be feared, respected and misunderstood by the people that will later join you on this earth.' And so Ma-en'-gun [Wolf] and Original Man set off on their different journey." (from The Mishomis Book by Benton-Banai, 1988 p. 8).

Chapter 12

Searching the Hollow

Aanji-Bimaadizi

Early January

It was the day before school started up again. The snowfall had taken a break the last few days and I was coming back from Tristan's house—we had been spending an hour or so each day practicing and perfecting our song for music class. He dropped me off and the warmth of the heater from his car still kept me warm in the freezing temperatures as I came around the back of the house and suddenly came upon Cocom and Ish in the backyard. Auntie had settled into her new home a few houses down, but she and Wolf still came by nearly every day. It was a part of our routine now, having everyone here. Cocom and Grandpa were moving in with her as she had a lot of rooms in her new place. I think it was also about having that company there too. Our house though, became very quiet when the four of them weren't around. It was also definitely quieter too without Grandma Myrtie and Grandpa Ed—they had left in the early morning and everyone, bleary-eyed and still in pyjamas had said goodbye to them. Grandpa Ed had also spent all Saturday watching hockey and screaming at the TV.

I supposed we would all just have to get used to all the quiet.

Cocom was showing Ish a bird's nest in one of the little bird houses Dad had attached under the eaves of the garage—Mom could see them from her bedroom window and loved watching the little chickadees and sparrows flitting and flying around and singing during the spring and summer months. The birds were flying around, gathering food and extra bits of string and brush and branches for insulation in their little houses. Cocom dumped a bag of birdseed into the feeder, spilling a bit onto the ground as the bag, nearly empty, dumped out the side. Ish went to try and pick the seed up.

"The birds will still get it there," she said.

Ish reached to break a branch off of the brittle tamarack tree in the yard.

"What if everyone did that to the tree?" Cocom asked him. He shrugged and I could see in the slump of his shoulders that he knew he had done something he shouldn't have.

"Then maybe the tree would have no branches left on it?" Ish wiggled his snow boot on the hard packed snow of one of the few winding paths in the back yard. "Sorry."

"Oh, well, you didn't rip a branch off of me did you?" Cocom smiled now.

"No," Ish replied. "Can I say sorry to the tree?"

"If you want to. But, maybe we can use the branch in something and we can thank the tree," Cocom said as she took a small bundle from her jacket pocket. She unwrapped it, pulled off a piece of ribbon, took a pinch of tobacco from the bundle and placed it into Ish's open palm.

"What do I do?" he asked, looking earnestly up into her face.

"Face east, and put the tobacco at the base of the tree. We shall thank the tree," Cocom said.

I had done the same, many times, giving thanks by gifting tobacco to the earth. I smiled as I watched Ish do the same. It saddened me a little though, that he hadn't done this before himself. He's seen it done many, many times, but hadn't done it himself.

"Do you know the manidoons?" Cocom asked.

Ish nodded frantically. "Yeth, it'th the lady bug. The little thpirit." I forced myself not to chuckle at his temporary lisp.

"Yes, it's a little spirit," Cocom nodded, smiling widely down at Ish as he squatted and put the bit of ceremonial tobacco at the base of the tree. "There's a spirit in everything. The birds and animals. The trees and plants and the rocks. And they all have something to teach us. So we should take care of them. We should take care of each other. We should love each other."

"And ourthelvth too," Ish added. Something from his memories jogging the response.

"Yes, Ish, we must love ourselves too and keep ourselves in balance, like everything else. Do you know what happens if something is not balanced?" Cocom asked him.

"It falls over and crashes!" Ish said loudly, mimicking a crashing gesture with his arms and hands and adding in the sound effects.

"Something like that, something like that," Cocom laughed and nodded. She ruffled Ish's hair and turned around, finally sensing me standing there a few meters behind them. She stared at me for a long, long time, her eyes boring into mine, telling me, willing me, and begging me to understand and to listen.

I smiled quickly at her and nodded.



I stood in a field in summer. The flowers were blooming and the grass was green. The winds blew against the full trees that surrounded the area. In the distance, the barest of paths exited from the trees and undergrowth on a small hill. I moved swiftly towards the woods. Those familiar woods.

Weesquachak was there in the woods. I saw him leaning against a tree. His arms hung loosely by his sides. He was smiling at me. He nodded his head at me. Then, around the trees near him, I saw them all. The many Apa'chininiichug, and Chuck—who I now realized was Chakabesh—the girl who had helped me up from the snow in my front yard had her hand on Chakabesh's shoulder—his sister, the two sisters who had been outside the theatre, that

horrifying rolling head and her sons and husband, the Windigo, everyone and everything. They were all replaying their stories—those sacred stories. I could remember them all now. I could remember hearing Cocom and Mom telling them to me. I could remember flipping the pages in those books that were in the wall-to-wall bookshelves in the basement of our house. Those books that were musty smelling and old and I had loved them anyway. But from this field, I could see each scene perfectly, as if I had binoculars and could see the details of their hair and clothing. It was as if they were the only ones there, each replaying their story.

The tree that Weesquachak was leaning against had somehow changed and now looked like it was a tree during fall.

The tree's leaves were bright red. Then, gradually, they turned orange. Finally, with the suddenness of a thunderclap, the leaves fell from the tree and to the ground.

Weesquachak had gone.

Then, slowly turning around and looking to the woods behind me, I saw him. He came from the path, his hands in his pockets. His hair, brown and wavy, was blown by the wind. His familiar smile was directed at me. He walked, casually and with what seemed like all the time in the world.

Tristan. He was in front of me now.

He brought his hands up to the sides of my face, and they felt cool.

He kissed me, briefly and softly, on the lips.

He smiled.

Then, he pointed to the sky.

A single blue butterfly flew.

Its fluttering was a random pattern in the sky.

The butterfly flew in front of me.

It hovered there. Wings flitting, body adjusting to the wind.

We watched each other, this butterfly and I, for a long while.

The flapping of its wings soon matched the beat to my own heart.

I smiled.

My joy moved through my body and reached my eyes.



Back at school, things went back into their usual routines. But everything felt different. It felt normal and calm and happy and hectic. I could smell those smells again by my locker as if

they were as fresh and new as the beginning of the school year—paint and fresh cut wood and that light scent of body odour. Even the air outside smelled cleaner, fresher, crisper.

The Friday of our first week back, Tristan and I had our culminating activity due in music class. We handed in the music sheet along with a USB of the electronic version of our song on it. We settled in at the front of the class, instruments tuned and warmed up.

We began the song, my stomach in knots, and I worried I would waver while I breathed across the hole in the lip plate of my flute. I had long pauses with my flute, when Tristan would show off some of his mad guitar skills. And it was in those parts that I would play a hand drum.

I had borrowed Cocom's hand drum. She had tightened it up in the fireplace that morning, having walked from Auntie's in the cold especially for me. I beat lightly on the drum, echoing in rhythm to our song and to Tristan's guitar playing.

When we finished our song, I slipped the drum gently, raw-hide side up, into the bag I brought it in and laid it right side up on an empty chair next to me in my normal row.

Aside from the necklace I wore during our last Music performance at the school, this was the first time that I had really announced to an entire group of people that I was Ojibwe. This was me waving my flag.

I saw Elder Isaac as I was leaving school at the end of the day and I had asked him if he was holding any drum making workshops with students. He was, in the second semester and there was going to be a female Elder helping out then too. I told him I was interested and that I wanted to make my own to take care of and drum.



That weekend, I took out the loom bracelet that Saagaate had started. Putting the beads into a paint palette, I began the final process. Slipping the beads onto the needle, pushing them up from underneath and up through the vertical threads, and then bringing the needle back around through the beads and over the top of those vertical threads. Row after row I did this, until, on Sunday morning, I had completed the last row. Taking a rectangular piece of leather, I attached the loom beadwork to the hide, sealing in the threads, and finished it off by winding and sewing bead after bead along the entire edges of the piece. A couple of snaps at the ends and the bracelet was finished. I put it on, feeling the weight of it on my wrist. The blue butterflies looked as if they were fluttering in their places around the little red flowers that were symmetrically scattered. I slept with it on that night.

It was the first night in a long while that I didn't worry about having any dreams—none had come.



That Friday, Tristan and I sat nervously in music, waiting for Mr. Garrett to hand back all of our culminating activity marks. It was our last class before our exams began. There were a lot of students completing late assignments, mostly brief biographies of famous composers that Mr. Garrett had assigned when we got back after Christmas. Towards the end of the class, Mr. Garrett pulled out squares of paper. Our marks. He handed them out, and one by one. Students

smiled, groaned and looked sick, or nearly jumped in their seats. I saw Tristan get his piece of paper, and a few students later I got mine.

I was shocked when I saw my mark. Tristan and I had gotten a perfect mark on our assignment! I turned behind me and smiled at Tristan. He grinned back, teeth showing. I tried not to seem too excited, especially when I noticed that the girl beside me only received a 'C' for her mark.

Just after music class, Sacha was suddenly standing beside me at my locker. My shoulders tensed. I said nothing.

"I'm really sorry. About the things that I said to you that day . . . and the times after that. I know they were really nasty. I just wanted to have someone feel as badly as—" She spoke really quickly and cut herself off. She suddenly looked deflated and tired. Just as suddenly, her expression hardened and her lips thinned. "You're still a bitch and this doesn't mean I want to ever be your friend. So please just accept my apology and I'll leave you alone from now on. Lesson learned."

"Apology accepted. But, you're right. This doesn't mean that we'll ever be friends. Something nasty like what you did . . . it's hard to forget." I spoke it loudly and angrily. None of my friends were around and I saw no one coming as I looked over Sacha's shoulder and down the hallway. Part of me was glad for it.

"Can you sign this? Mr. Bianci said you were to sign it and I have to give it back to him. It just says I apologized to you and that you accepted my apology." She thrust the piece of paper at me and, after a quick scan of the letter, I signed it and handed it back to her. She ripped it out of my hand and stomped down the hallway.

"Well, that didn't seem too bad," Tristan said, suddenly beside me.

"Yeah, well, I just don't want to drag that on any more and I'm glad it's over with," I answered honestly.

"Everyone's outside already. We're going to go to Cala's farm and watch Zoe take the first of her riding lessons," he smiled, gesturing someone on a horse holding the reins and screaming. I laughed.

"Sounds good," I smiled. "Hey, I'm glad we did the song together."

"Me too, mon chère," Tristan winked. "Plus, I didn't mind getting an A on it either! Next up, final exams! Oh, I'm so excited!"

I laughed as he stuck out his tongue and rolled his eyes.

"Well, we can be study buddies," I teased.

"You betcha!" he laughed, bringing me in for a quick kiss before we left the school and hopped into Zoe's van where everyone was waiting, and not so patiently.

“To let go of something (like knowledge or love or hate) is not to throw it away. It is to step outside its shadow so that things may be seen in a different light” (from The Sacred Tree by Lane et al., p. 66)

Chapter 13

Saying Goodbye, But Never Gone

Giga-Waabamin Menawaa

Late January

I walked into her hospital room, trying to ignore the smells of cleaners and chemicals that permeated the entire building. She looked tired. She looked weak. But she smiled when she saw us and I went over and kissed her on the cheek.

“Hi, Cocom,” I smiled. “Love you. You okay today?”

Ish and Ettie did the same. Then Mom sat by Cocom and talked with her in Ojibwe for a while. I could only pick out a few words of what they were saying. I wished I was fluent.

I hated to think it and I tried to get it out of my mind, but I thought about the day when I might be doing the same thing with my Mom and Dad. I wish I knew my Cocom better, wish I could speak the language with her, that I was fluent in Ojibwe so we could have talked a lot and about everything. I tried not to cry.

“Oh, what are the tears for? I only had my appendix removed,” she squeezed my hand. “No need to be thinking of sad things. Besides, even if something did happen, I’d still be around. My spirit will go somewhere else, and my energy will flow into other things and they’ll keep growing and living.”

“Yeah, I guess,” I frowned. I thought of Saagaate suddenly. How her spirit was somewhere else. Cocom told me that her energy went into other things, that we never were really gone forever. Our energy and our spirit went into the things around us, the trees, the flowers, a bird, a deer, the wind. It was actually a bit of a comfort thinking that she wasn’t really gone, not completely. It was a nice idea. I smiled lightly at the thought.



Ettie and I went to Saagaate’s grave after the last of our exams were written. We smudged there, letting the vanilla scent waft over and around us, cleansing us. We talked to her, told her the things that had happened since she left us, the good, the bad, the hilarious. We told her we missed her. But I told Ettie this and she didn’t argue against me, that there was some comfort in thinking that a part of her was still around in some way. Perhaps in a squirrel. Perhaps in a flower. Perhaps in a tree.

When we came back home, Ettie started a fire in the fire pit in the back yard. We had lit it a few times during Christmas break and it didn’t seem odd to anyone that we lit it now, especially since final exams were officially over and we were going into a week

break from school before second semester started. So Ettie and I sat out in the back yard, the air crisp and cold around us, but warmed at the same time from the heat of the fire.

Ettie disappeared for a few minutes then came back out with a couple of cans of pop and what I assumed was her journal.

"That's your journal?" I asked her, pointing at it.

"Yeah," she stared at it, first turning it over in her hand, and then she placed it into the fire. "I don't need it anymore. What about you?"

"What do you mean?" I was puzzled.

"Your journal. Did you want to do the same thing?" she leaned back in her chair, head cocked to the side as she stared at me. "You didn't know I knew?"

"No. I thought Mom had only given one to me. Then you told me about yours, and I didn't want to get into talking about it and I wanted you to feel special about getting yours," I replied.

"Ah, I see. Well, it helped me a lot. Writing everything down. But I don't need to keep it around anymore. It just sits there, burning and reminding me of everything nasty I put in there." She was sipping from her pop.

"Yeah," I agreed. It sat in my desk drawer, a kind of black stain now that I had emptied everything into that thing, all my hate and rage and anger and sadness.

"Mom bought us some new ones," Ettie added, giving me a little smile. "She said for us to put our happy thoughts in, and all the good things, and that we could look back on it to remind us of all of those when we're feeling down."

"That's a good idea," I leaned forward in my chair, putting my can of pop into a mound of snow near my tree stump that I used as a chair. "I'll be right back."

I ran to my room, snatching the journal from my desk, and when I got near the fire, I felt myself hesitate. Part of me worried about burning all of this. It had been so close to me for months. Like a leech, it drew out all of my negativity. In a rush, I tossed it into the fire and slumped down onto the stump, watching as the pages blacked and caught fire, burning and burning around the edges until there was nothing left but ashes that were once paper and everything else.

"Here," Ettie held out a new hard cover spiraled journal. Swirls of green and red leaves and flowers were embossed on the front. "Mine's more purple and blue."

I took the new journal and smiled at her.



Lying on my stomach in my room that night, I flipped through the empty pages of the journal.

Just the happy things. Just the happy thoughts. To remind me when I have those moments of sadness. It will help to cheer me up when I need it.

That night, I had a dream. It was the first thing that I wrote about—sort of—in my new journal the next morning.

*The Sun
Warmed my face
Hiding the shadows
Of horror*

*The horrors that hid there
Stains on my heart
Waiting to spread
If I let them*

*The dreams
Of terror and pain
Of beauty and happiness
How much of it all still lingered in my heart?*

*The beauty that lay there
Light on my heart
A stubborn willingness*

*Nearly consuming
That darkness
I tried to rid the stain free
Wings and limbs nearly torn off
I fought
Embattled
I persevered*

*I held on to hope
I have fought my way
I have lived
I live
I will live*

*I have learned
Through all of this
Through all of the
Good and the bad
In my heart I know it
To be true*

*I hold on to those things
I hold on to that light*

*I have learned
I know not all
In this one life
I have grown
Like the butterfly
Memengwaa
I have transformed
A metamorphosis*

I woke up. Needing to stretch, I made my way to the window seat and stretched my arms as I sat cross-legged.

Snow was falling. The large flakes blew across the street. I squinted my eyes to try and see the park down the street. It was then, between the falling of snowflakes that I thought I saw something. It was only fleeting.

A wolf. No. It was a coyote. It paced back and forth, and then it sat there and stared in my direction. I felt no fear that it was there, staring at me.

We watched each other for a few minutes; only the falling of the snow blocked our eyesight.

And then it was gone, having dashed into the forested park grounds.

I smiled. I knew I had seen his brother and went back to bed.



The following night, I began to write down all of the happy things and the good things and the funny things that have happened since Saagaate's death. I left my room only for food and the bathroom. When I had finished, it was nearly three o'clock in the morning. My hand was cramped, as were my neck and my shoulders. After turning off my lamp on my side table, I lay down, shoving a pillow under my knees to ease the ache in my lower back and neck. I relaxed there, feeling fuzzy from the lateness of the hour.

I took my iPad from my side table, turning it to find the "on" tab, when I felt the etching on the back. I had completely forgotten it was there. I took a small flashlight from my side table and flicked it on. The bright light stung my eyes and I squinted while my eyes adjusted. I turned my iPad over and read the inscription. It was an inscription of one of my favourite "Native" quotes that could be seen nearly anywhere. Even so, it always inspired something in me when I read it.

Let your dreams run wild

Be brave enough to follow

I clicked my flashlight off and placed the iPad and flashlight back onto my side table. I stared up at the glowing stars on my ceiling. In the darkness, I smiled to nobody.

That is the length of the story.

Part Three: Epilogue

Immersing Myself in Context, Themes and Characters

Within my dissertation novel, I have incorporated the knowledge gained from the sacred stories I have read. I used the background knowledge gained from the transcripts from my Cocom's stories as my way of enhancing my understanding of the world in which Butterfly lives and of the characters she interacts with. My interpretation of the world, my creation of unique characters, my interpretation of sacred story characters, and my creation of a unique plot is the dissertation novel. The actual sacred stories are not retold in full in my dissertation novel because it would be inappropriate to do so in this format (please see Part 1). This section focuses on discussion and analyses of sacred story characters, themes, and Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Immersing Myself in My Personal Stories

To begin my journey in writing my dissertation novel, I drew upon information gathered from personal journals written when I was in high school, photographs of that time period, a visit to my former high school again (although not specifically for the purpose of my dissertation at the time), and memories. I wrote about my memories in both purposeful and reflexive ways as they came to me. Writing about personal memories is evident in the first scene where Butterfly cuts her finger and describes the sensation and her feelings about it (Chapter 7); the scene where Sacha vehemently insults Butterfly, saying that she was not an "Indian because you don't even live in the bush" (p. 71); and the scene where Butterfly views Saagaate in the coffin and describes her appearance (p. 96). Writing reflexively about personal memories occurred in moments when I was in the

midst of writing and recalled a memory that would fit well within my story. An example of this includes the scene where Butterfly and her friend bite their thumbs at each other following their English class where they have been studying a Shakespeare play (p. 75). By writing this way, I found that I was able to create a sense of realism and emotional depth while developing my themes and topics (see Part 1) since I was purposely drawing on real events and my feelings about them for inspiration.

Deciding which sacred stories to draw on within my dissertation novel was difficult; however, I ultimately chose stories that included characters that I was drawn to and interested in. To explain, I chose characters that I had heard about since I was a child and had felt a nostalgic connection to, such as Chakabesh and Weesquachak. I was drawn to Chakabesh because of his light-heartedness, his mischievous ways, and his playfulness (Ellis, 1995; Johnston, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003), and because these were some of the first sacred stories I remember hearing from my mother when I was young. When we think of the themes that inform my theoretical framework, Seven Grandfather Teachings can be seen in scenes featuring Chakabesh. For example, the teaching of humility can be seen when Chakabesh is fighting with the football players and is chastised by the Principal. I was drawn to stories of Weesquachak because of his ability to cause change in everything around him, and of the nature of his duality: he demonstrates both kindness and cruelty, and it is often shown that he has a curiosity about humans (Ellis, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003). In the scenes with Weesquachak, there is a strong connection with land and animals. For instance, we always see Weesquachak in and near a forest and in a field. We also see him interacting with butterflies and there is a suggested connection between Weesquachak and a coyote. This coyote alludes to the idea that in some stories,

Weesquachak can transform into a Coyote (King, 1993, 2004), or that coyote is his brother, which explains why they are often seen together (Ellis, 1995; Johnston 1995).

There are also other characters that I find intriguing. I was initially drawn to stories of Rolling Head because of the brutality of the former mother, of the loving relationship between her and her husband and sons, and how quickly this was all destroyed. There are connections here to ethics of non-interference and anger. We also see love, respect and humility from the Seven Grandfather Teachings. The story of Rolling Head, where we see the perseverance of the young brothers to stay alive and resist the demonized head that was once their mother, may be one of the few stories of terror that appear in Ojibwe and Cree sacred story outside of those about Windigo (Ray & Stevens, 2003). The teachings regarding these characters are seen in two ways: clear connections to the proper teaching (i.e. direct love), and to the adverse of the teachings (i.e. what happens when one shows anger and when one is disrespectful).

Immersing Myself in Texts and Making Choices

As I went through all of my texts on sacred stories, I focused on sacred story characters that had three dimensional personalities and traits, like Chakabesh, Weesquachak, and Rolling Head. These characters' traits are not all good or all bad. They have traits from across the spectrum. For instance, Rolling Head has moments of being caring and moments of being ruthless. Chakabesh is playful and respectful, but also arrogant. Weesquachak is patient and quiet, but curious as well. These sacred story characters are characters that I personally found interesting, as I mentioned above, and that allowed me to be able to connect to my personal life history (for example, the

playfulness of Chakabesh is evident with Butterfly when she's playful with her friends and family, and when she enjoys some of the smaller pleasures like a quiet moment, some time with her kitten, or being with her sister). Through these sacred story characters, I could also reflect upon and connect to the topics in my dissertation novel: how Weesquachak and his appearances to Butterfly affect her in ways that cause her to look closely or even doubt herself, and where the characters and their stories connect to the Seven Grandfather Teachings either directly or indirectly.

I also connected the themes in my dissertation novel to those that I had found while reading the sacred stories in preparation for writing. Some of these themes include: connections to land; connections to animals; love for oneself, others, animals, and land; the importance of family and community; and perseverance. Later, I discuss the characters (traits, actions, behaviours) and how they may reflect the Teachings; I also discuss the Seven Grandfather Teachings present in the stories, linking any similarities between stories and characters and noting any distinct differences.

The sources of data include the primary sources of textual sacred stories such as the works from Odjig (2009a-j), Johnston (1995), Ray & Stevens, 2003, Fiddler & Stevens (1999), and, Ellis (1995). Regarding Odjig's texts—where she retold and published the tales of the trickster Nanabush in English text—I grew up reading and listening to these stories—they were in the basement of our family home, on a lower shelf of wall-to-wall books that my mother primarily had collected. The works by Ray and Stevens, Fiddler and Stevens, and Ellis became familiar to me later in life, starting when I was in high school, when I would visit my mother's office in the University where she taught. I would look at the books on her shelves, asking questions about the kinds of

stories that were in them and who wrote them and looking through them to see how many of them I already knew. These same stories, which were told by Elders (typically, but not always, in their own language) and then transcribed and published, became a great source for me to draw upon in my Master's and especially now during my dissertation work. My connection with these sources of sacred story is much more personal, rather than if I had just come upon them during research and decided they were useful; they are personal because they are a part of my early childhood memories of story and reading.

As part of the background to my understanding of sacred stories I drew upon understandings shared with me by my Cocom (grandmother). My mother recorded my Cocom sharing sacred stories before she passed (1991-1995). I grew up having these family stories told to me. When my Cocom was still alive, on rare occasions she would tell stories and my mother would translate. Or my mother would tell me the stories that my Cocom told her when she was growing up. The tapes from my Cocom were a translation project for my mother quite a few years ago and I draw knowledge from those transcriptions: my Cocom told many of the sacred stories passed down within my family from my ancestors. These translations and tapes serve as background knowledge that are a rich source of understanding from which I draw inspiration to write my own stories and the dissertation novel—I had access to them only as a source of knowledge, but was not given permission to quote from them. Although these stories are not incorporated or explicitly used, I felt it important to discuss how they still provide me with knowledge. On this point of the importance of story to family history, Augustine (2008) describes; “in some Aboriginal societies there are oral histories which take the form of songs and stories which belong to one family and permission is required from that family to sing the

song/tell the story. As well, in regard to Aboriginal oral traditions, these accounts are often the history of the group . . . Indigenous peoples did not keep knowledge exclusive of others" (p. 3). Although my Cocom has passed on, it is important for me that the stories of my own family continue on, especially since they are such an inspiration and provide important background knowledge for my dissertation. On an interesting background note, my Cocom apparently was not technologically proficient, and at times did not know when the tape ran out and she kept talking. My mother, in her transcription project, completed the stories from memory, having heard them growing up.

Immersing Myself in Sacred Story Characters

I immersed myself in characters from sacred stories. Selecting which characters to choose to include within my dissertation novel took a lot of reading of sacred stories. The sacred stories printed as English text that I referred to for this dissertation include: Ahenakew and Racette (1999), Benton-Banai (1988), Ellis (1995), Fiddler and Stevens (1999), Fox (1974), Johnston (1975, 1994, 1995), Odjig's texts (2009a-j), Overholt and Callicott (1982), Ray and Stevens (2003), Reid (1979), Sugarhead and O'Meara (1996), Williams, Bloomfield and Nichols (1991).

Specific Themes within the Novel as Method

As another part of my theoretical framework, which I discuss in this section, the themes of human relationships to the land and animals, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and characters from sacred stories are integrated within the sacred stories of the Ojibwe and Cree cultures that I draw upon and which are demonstrated/lived through the actions/life of the protagonist Butterfly.

The connection to and understanding of land and the environment is integrated deeply into the cultures of many Indigenous groups, and, specifically, into the Anishinawbe culture about which I can speak directly. As Augustine (2008) writes, "With the changing and cyclical nature of our relationship with the land our knowledge systems adapted over time and space" (p. 3). As animal habits changed over time to coincide, perhaps, with changes in the landscape, Indigenous peoples adapted with them. Battiste (2008) discusses the connection with the environment,

Indigenous knowledge represents a complex and dynamic capacity of knowing, a knowledge that results from knowing one's ecological environment the skills and knowledge derived from that place, knowledge of the animals and plants and their patterns within that space, and the vital skills and talents necessary to survive and sustain themselves within that environment. (p. 499)

Thus, what is reflected within the novel portion of my dissertation is the deeply rooted and highly complex relationship with the land and the animals. Through various connections, experiences and relationships with the land and animals, Butterfly's world is enriched, which helps her to develop as a person, albeit fictional. Additionally, life experiences are also found in the various rituals of daily life such as the giving of tobacco to hunted animals that also lend themselves to experiences shared with the land and animals. As Paula Gunn Allen (1986) writes, the traditions and ritual life of Indigenous communities are diverse, but "they are all earth-based and wilderness-centered . . . concerned with sacred or nonpolitical power" (p. 78). Reflected in the novel through the lives of the characters is how the Indigenous relationship to land and animals can be

taught and explored. We also see a growth in relationship with animals where Butterfly is given a kitten that she names Sir Didymus. We see how she gains comfort from the kitten's purrs, how she cares for the kitten when she fills its water bowl and cleans the litter box, and how she protects the kitten when it is scared (p. 100, 102, 103, 104, 116, 126, 141, 149, 150, 164).

Additional themes present in the novel include experiences of adversity, issues of identity, and how she copes with these. We see adversity (either struggling with, coping with, or overcoming) with events including the death of Saagaate, the racist verbal attack on Butterfly by Sacha and Butterfly's resulting avoidance of Sacha, Butterfly's growing depression that moves into self-destructive tendencies like self-cutting, and her physical and spiritual fight with the Windigo. We see issues of identity surrounding Butterfly. Early in the novel we see no outward expressions of her culture while she is in school. As the novel develops, Butterfly opens up more and more about her culture and ends up borrowing the family hand drum from her Cocom and playing it with Tristan in their music class (p. 169).

The Seven Grandfather Teachings help to convey the message of how Indigenous people live in harmony with the land and animals, and how there is a deeply rooted cultural understanding of the delicate balance of this relationship, especially when we consider the idea that what you do comes back to you (Benton-Banai, 1988). As a backbone of the novel, the Seven Grandfather Teachings are integrated in various ways: sometimes overt, sometimes more subtle—I discuss these in the analyses section later on. The Seven Grandfather Teachings are a part of the characters in the dissertation novel in

that the characters live with them in their daily lives and experience the teachings intrinsically.

Thirdly, while there are many characters from the sacred stories of the Ojibwe and Cree nations, I only refer to and reflect upon some of them. As indicated earlier, these choices were based on what I saw as character connections to the topics of my dissertation (Seven Grandfather Teachings and morals and values, ethics, and codes of conduct and behaviour) and to themes in my dissertation (connections to land; connections to animals; love for oneself, others, animals, and land; the importance of family and community; and perseverance) and characters which I felt a personal connection with as well. The sacred story characters I have chosen to include within my novel, which are most reflective of Anishinawbe teachings, of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, of the themes in my dissertation, and which I most connect with on a personal level are Chakabesh "Chuck", Weesquachak, Iyas, Windigo, Rolling Head and her sons and husband, the Proud Maiden from Ray and Stevens' (2003) "The Secret Name" (pp. 33-35), and "The Younger Sister" from Ray and Stevens (2003, p. 67). Chakabesh has a westernized nickname only because he appears in Butterfly's high school, is seen by the students in the school, and is given a nickname by the Western students there. I have chosen these characters for a variety of reasons: personal interest, cultural importance, and effective demonstration of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. I discuss these character connections in the analysis section.

There is only a selection of characters from the sacred stories written into my novel for the purpose of providing an in-depth understanding of the characters and to prevent character confusion or character overload. In Indigenous stories, characters ought

to be learnt over time, through repeated hearing of stories and characters within the stories. This natural process of building up knowledge is not replicated in the presentations of characters in a novel. So I have come to think of the dissertation novel as containing only a few stories, with a few characters—a small subset of the richness of the sacred stories of the Anishinawbe as I have discussed above. As such, there is no attempt to be exhaustive in including all potential characters or themes.

By focusing on a few characters, I can more accurately portray them and create more effective and deeper relationships between them and Butterfly. For instance, I can focus more heavily on Weesquachak, Chakabesh, and Windigo and create more story plot and events with them than if I were to focus heavily on all characters I touch upon or even if I were to add more. However some of the sacred story characters are not given names or the names vary across the Ojibwe and Cree communities and so I described their physical appearance rather than provided a name.

To explain further about my writing process, I feel I should describe the role of “Butterfly” within the story and the process of choosing her name. Butterfly, in the cultural dialect of my Ojibwe family, translates as Memengwaa. During the initial story-writing process of a portion of the dissertation novel/story, the main character’s name was initially “Diimii” which I thought to mean “deep water”, and which I found in Patricia Ningewance’s (2004) book *Talking Gookum’s Language: Learning Ojibwe*. However, when I inquired later on about the name to my mother, who is fluent in my family’s Ojibwe language, the dialect was so different she could not recognize Diimii as meaning deep water. Thus, I changed the name briefly to Firefly because as a child I had loved seeing their lights in the brush at camp—that is until I then learned (by chance) that

only the male of the species actually "lit up". I spent quite a long time going through other possible names because I wanted to choose a name that was based on an animal or other creature. Although the butterflies are not described in great detail in the story, I felt that having the background knowledge of the specific butterfly I was writing about was important.

I have always had an interest in entomology, the study of insects. I remember wandering the hall of the Braun Building at Lakehead University during break from classes and looking closely at the panels of preserved and displayed insects, in particular, the butterflies. The idea of preservation of species conflicts with my culture's traditions which teach that we should not interfere in the lives of others (including the manidoons/insects), as Dr. Clare Brant's (1990) research shows us in his ethic of non-interference. While I was fascinated at the butterflies displayed in the cases that hung on walls, I knew that this also went against my traditional teachings that say that the killing of animals should occur only as a necessity of survival. The idea of taxonomy also conflicts with traditional knowledge building. My traditional teachings also say that knowledge is derived from the observation of nature as it occurs over periods of time based on environmental conditions, and that knowledge keepers provide their own unique insights to build on the overall understanding of an observation (Battiste, 2005). In her article on Indigenous knowledge, Marie Battiste (2005) writes,

Indigenous peoples have their own methods for classifying and transmitting knowledge, just as they have Indigenous ways of deriving a livelihood from their environment. Information, insight, and techniques are passed down and improved from one generation to another.

Knowledge workers observe ecosystems and gather eyewitness reports from others so that they can continually test and improve their own systematic, predictive models of ecological dynamics. (p. 8)

For me then, in terms of understanding the source of knowledge and how best to build my understandings, it also became about balancing my interest in entomology and its taxonomic structure with my traditional teachings.

My interest in butterflies began during my undergrad when I happened to be walking through a hallway and saw the framed butterflies hanging on the wall. A blue one called *Papilio Pericles* had always been my favourite from my own collection as well and so I decided upon the name Butterfly. The Blue Morpho was my first choice of butterfly that Butterfly sees in her dreams: I had visited the Butterfly Conservatory in the Niagara region quite a few years ago and I thought the Blue Morpho to be quite beautiful. However, after doing some recent research about the migration of the Blue Morpho butterfly, I found that it has been spotted very rarely (only once or twice) in the Thunder Bay area. I wanted a butterfly that was a regular to the Thunder Bay area. I wanted to keep to the blue colour because Blue Butterfly is Butterfly's spirit name, and after some research on blue butterflies in the region, I learned of a butterfly called Silvery Blue (*Glaucopsyche Lygdamus*) whose female of the species do have a dark iridescent blue with dark grey to black borders on their upper wings (Layberry, Hall, & Lafontaine, 1998).

I provide the background journey in finding the "right" name for my protagonist here so that it can be better understood how important her name was for me. I wanted to

find something that reflected an overall feeling of my dissertation novel: something that showed an essence of the protagonist and her journey. The idea of transformation and metamorphosis was something I had thought about quite a lot. It is not important that she does not physically start out as a butterfly. What is important is that her spirit, her love for herself, and her sense of self, has transformed and grown by the end of the dissertation novel—this is even reflected when she dreams of Weesquachak and he shows her the time-lapse of the growth and metamorphosis of caterpillar into butterflies.

Butterfly transforms from depressed to happy, from feeling confused or even ashamed of her cultural background to being proud of it, and from feeling confused about being able to love to loving herself, her boyfriend Tristan, and even her kitten. When I think of those butterflies and their changes from larvae to caterpillar to butterfly, I also think of transformation. This idea of transformation has always interested me and I felt compelled to include that within the novel—transformation and can be either physical or internal or spiritual. The connection to the metamorphosis from caterpillar, to cocoon, then to butterfly intrigued me greatly as a theme of change and persistence, of how the character changed through the events in her life in the novel and grew and metamorphosed by the end. There is also a scene in the dissertation novel where Butterfly is in a dream with Weesquachak who takes her through the transformation of thousands of butterflies (p. 139-140). We see the power of transformation everyday: a maggot to a fly, a corn kernel to popped corn, a caterpillar to a butterfly or moth, an embryo to a baby, and even how landscapes can transform over time when water is present or disappears completely. Hence, I drew upon this idea of transformation for the title of the dissertation; "To be a

butterfly" which is memengwaawid in Ojibwe and is the final stage of the metamorphosis or transformation into a full-grown butterfly.

Analysis of the Dissertation Novel and its Characters

In this chapter, I provide an analysis and discussion of the themes and issues that appear within the dissertation novel. Included are analyses and discussion on the themes of relationships and connections with animals and animals as pets, knowledge from and connections to the land; the Seven Grandfather Teachings and how they are embedded within the dissertation story as an echoing practice in sacred story; of how the behaviours and interactions with sacred story characters affect Butterfly and the story plot; of the cultural traditions and ceremonies included within the novel and how Butterfly sees, learns, and practices them; and of the issues of adversity, identity, and realities many Anishinawbe students face today and how Butterfly engages and copes with them. I will also provide an analysis and discussion of the protagonist, "Butterfly", including some discussion on the parts of her that are fictional and those that are semi-autobiographical. I will acknowledge here that with the use of translated sacred stories, I risk losing meaning and nuances that are only truly understood and reflected in the language they are originally spoken. It is well known that many Indigenous peoples no longer speak their cultural language (Lacourt, St. Clair, Kokotailo, Wilson & Chewing, 2005). In Canada, many Indigenous peoples only speak English. It is a problem, especially with regards to sacred story, that must be contended with. I try to bridge some of these language barriers by incorporating Anishinawbemowin within dialogue and in chapter titles. That I present my story in English may also be another concern since I do speak about characters and teachings in sacred stories.

Animals in Indigenous Stories

Animals, especially as pets, are another area that I had looked into while doing preliminary research. Ellis (1995) writes of the importance of animals as pets in his work on sacred stories: "A Dog Team Race" (pp. 182-183) and "About Animals Kept as Pets" (p. 158-159) are two examples. The importance of the relationship of dogs to humans is evident in Ray and Stevens (2003) sacred story "Wee-sa-kay-jac and the Animals" (pp. 24-26). Ray and Stevens' sacred story has connections to Ojibwe and Cree Creation Story in terms of a Great Flood. In this story, Weesquachak calls the animals together to participate in a race to see who would become companions to humans who have grown in number since the Great Flood. In this race, the Dog came back first, then the Wolf, and, finally, the Deer. As reward, Weesquachak declared that the Dog would be the companion to humans and explains why now dogs are considered to be "man's best friend" (p. 26). We can see more of this structure and purpose of pets in popular discourse story provided by Ellis (1995) in a story entitled *About Animals Kept as Pets*:

This story is about pet animals.

Once long ago when I was little, I remember that we used to have a beaver for a pet. While we were asleep, he used to work as hard as he could. During the day, however, he used to sleep for all he was worth.

So then, during the night as we were sleeping, in our home, in the tent, he would work as hard as he could at the door by which one went out. He cut willow sticks with his teeth, and then he brought them to the door.

When we got up in the morning, he had completely blocked up our door. During the night he did it: he worked as hard as he could closing

up the door, just as he did to a river.

And then, when we got up in the morning he was already lying asleep, because he had been working in the meantime during the night. (p. 159)

Animals as pets, it seems, provide not only companionship, but also purpose.

The significance of dogs is also another concept in sacred story that is reflected in Williams, Bloomfield and Nichols' (1991) collection of stories in *The Dog's Children: "The Dog's Children"* (pp. 56-73), "The Daughter of a Dog" (pp. 74-77), and "The Son of a Dog" (pp. 78-83). We also see dog story in Sugarhead and O'Meara (1996) with "The Dog and the Squirrel" in which the squirrel prepares for winter by collecting food, but the dog is lazy and becomes cold and hungry when winter arrives (pp. 42-45). These narrative stories concerning animals that Ellis (1995) presents fit within a category of story and narrative that is "by its nature, more casual and often more impromptu" (p. xix), and includes stories of personal experiences, childhood memories, reminiscences, and traumatic experience which are also told as "informal narrative" (p. xxxv). Contrasting to the traditional discourse of sacred story (discussed below), this popular discourse allows the tellers of these stories a variety of themes and improvisations (Ellis, p. xxxv). This informality is important when I speak of the land and animals as a theme within my dissertation novel, as my engagement with this theme comes from dialogue and personal experience. In Ellis' (1995) text, we see stories of animals as pets, and animals in everyday life. This is what I also tried to echo within my story.

Although contact with animals is limited to the two pets within Butterfly's house, the family dog Ralphie and Butterfly's kitten Sir Didymus, this contact with animals as

pets is important. To explain, Ralphie is meant to be a reminder of these teachings and of the significance of dogs to humans and is why Butterfly takes Ralphie on walks with her and why Ralphie is with her when she sees Weesquachak in the forest area near her family home (pp. 112, 114-115, 150). The presence of Ralphie and Sir Didymus reflects the telling of stories in popular discourse about animals and animals as pets. Ellis (1995) provides examples of these types of stories in his work where atypical animals as pets, such as beavers, otters, and hawks (p. 159, 161, 163) are told with only some embellishment; these are much more casual and free of any set structure than what we see in traditional discourse like sacred stories that feature characters such as Chakabesh or Weesquachak and talking animals. To explain, Ralphie and Sir Didymus cannot speak. They are not involved in high-level sacred story where they are involved with how something in nature came to be or came to be changed. They also do not interact closely with Weesquachak or have some other purpose in the story other than as family pets; they do not drive the plot. For the pet dog Ralphie, his separation from any ceremony the members of the family perform and his disconnect from direct interactions with Weesquachak is important. As Benton-Banai (1988) explains, "we should never let dogs be around our sacred ceremonies. To do so would violate Creator's wishes and endanger the lives of those participating in the ceremony. So also, dogs are not supposed to be around places where ceremonial objects are stored" (p. 9). Ralphie and Sir Didymus are treated as family pets, both for the family and in the plot. Traditionally, dogs were often pets for Anishinawbe people (Ray & Stevens, 2003), but cats were not. But the cat also has a role in the dissertation story: providing comfort and love to Butterfly.

Each animal, whether a pet or not, has its place in the world. Basil Johnston (1994)

writes: "each species and each individual creature was endowed with unique and singular powers proper to himself and his kind. Each had his sphere on earth, each his own time of the performance and fulfillment of his purpose and powers. Such was the general nature of animal beings" (p. 46). The inclusion in my story of cats as pets comes from a contemporary lifestyle and not a traditional one. Since my story takes place in a contemporary time set in the present day, where characters are seen watching television and using iPads, I felt that cats as pets were an appropriate fit. What we can also infer from the above story, are the day-to-day interactions with animals and pets. I describe these interactions below in the section on Love.

Connections to Land

The connection to land is also important. In the dissertation novel, we see this connection to the land when the family goes hunting in their traditional territory (p. 85-92), and where Butterfly takes walks to and can see a forested park down the street from her family house (pp. 112, 114-115, 150). Everything we do has connection to the land in some way and we are always connected to it and each other (Cajete, 1994, p. 165). In the popular discourse that Ellis (1995) provides, personal experiences rely heavily upon those connections to land and the animals in it. Stories about interactions with polar bears and moose, being caught in blizzards, hunting on a river, losing a rifle, stories of youth, and nearly freezing to death are all examples of these casual stories that Ellis provides in his work on legends and narratives (1995). Connection to the land is especially important within my dissertation novel. It is widely felt by Anishinawbe people that you should be respectful to nature (Cajete, 1994; Johnston, 1994). Cajete (1994) writes that for "Indigenous cultures around the world, the natural environment *was* the essential reality,

the 'place of being'. Nature was taught and understood *in* and *on* its own terms . . . a mutual-reciprocal relationship was established and perpetuated between Tribal people and their environment" (p. 38). Disrespect and carelessness towards others and all living beings would also have negative effects that could come back to you (Lane, et al, 1985). One sacred story, which falls under personal experience narratives, is the story of a man kicking at snow. Ellis (1995) presents the story "The man who kicked away the snow" (pp. 155-157) which tells the story of a man whose brother dies during the winter months and the man becomes angry at the snow and kicks it. The snow comes back the next year and fights the man in his cabin until the fire inside begins to melt snow. This particular story, which I first heard from my mother when I was very young, has always stuck with me. I wanted to present some of that knowledge of respect and the idea that what you do comes back to you. I have done this in the scene where Butterfly speaks with her Cocom about the winter and snow and Cocom advises Ettie to not kick the snow (p. 146).

Throughout the novel, Butterfly is drawn to the forest near her house that she can also see through her bedroom window. Although she has lived near this forest for her entire life so far, we get the sense that she is, in some ways, still intrigued and curious about it. Her family does not live on traditional land. Thus, Butterfly's interactions with the land and landscapes are formed by the city landscapes around her. Butterfly performs no ceremony in the park, although her Cocom shows her brother Ish how to place tobacco near a tree in their backyard as a way of giving thanks for its gifts and because Ish had ripped a branch off of the tree (pp. 166-167). The park near Butterfly's home is a blend of both city land and a wooded area that merges back into a forest. Butterfly's interest in the forest is evident as she purposefully takes her dog with her on walks through it:

I decided to take Ralphie for a walk one afternoon, giving Dad a break, since he was sick in bed with the flu. The park near our house blended into the woods near the outskirts of town. I took one of the hilly paths that meandered throughout the park; it was one of the longer paths. A little while into my walk with Ralphie, I noticed that the hill I was about to climb, turned to the right and it reminded me of the hill in my dream. That path. (p. 112)

Butterfly's interest in the forest is also enhanced when she thinks she sees the Weesquachak from her dreams and wants to find out the truth:

'Hey, wait!' I called out and ran to the tree. Ralphie was still pulling me along, just as eager to see what or who it was as I did. But what was I doing? It could've been a crazy person, a murderer, a rapist. I was at the tree. I walked around it. (p. 112)

This merging of worlds is also a way for Weesquachak to move from his world in sacred story and the forest to the park boundary where there are still trees. With Weesquachak, I chose to keep him within the forested areas as a way to keep his connections to sacred story and his role in them important. Other characters like Chakabesh shift into Butterfly's physical world because they have changed somehow. Chakabesh is known as Chuck in Butterfly's school and although he wears modern clothes his hair is long and kept in a traditional style. His move into a "real" world is in keeping with his curious nature and the sense of exploration that he exudes in the sacred stories. In a sense, this blend of both modern and traditional (for landscape and characters) becomes a metaphor for the dissertation story itself.

This connection to land is also evident through her many dreams in which the land is central to the dream and often described—the same forest and its paths are predominant in her dreams (pp. 58, 64-65, 73, 74, 79, 97-98, 146-147, 151-154). We also see fields, a river, and other locations set on the land in her dreams (pp. 62, 83-84, 97, 110, 121, 139-140, 167-168). The land and animals are important as the teachings that Butterfly gains while interacting with them and other events during the novel.

Incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings

Within my dissertation novel I include all of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. I include them all to ensure that I reflect upon all seven.

Wisdom.

When we speak of wisdom, we “cherish knowledge to know [that] wisdom” (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64) and we “better life through knowledge of life” (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, p. 63). In the dissertation novel, wisdom can be seen when Tristan researches poetry—a Tanka style of poem which is a form of Japanese love poetry—to write Butterfly a song (p. 137-138). The Tanka is comprised of five lines with each line representing a certain number of syllables: 5, 7, 5, 7, 7. There is wisdom is not only learning the poem style, but also wisdom in knowing that it would also be something that Butterfly would appreciate. By doing this Tristan is cherishing knowledge (Benton-Banai, 1988). In this instance, we see that Butterfly watches and listens to Tristan as he sings the song for her (Bouchard & Martin, 2009, p. 19). There is wisdom in the understanding of each other’s affections and trust in each other, because to deny that would deny opportunity for their love. We also see wisdom used after Butterfly overcomes the Windigo attack and understands how the love of others and oneself can

help her overcome obstacles in life (pp. 151-154). On this, David Bouchard and J. Martin (2009) write that "now is the time to ponder over life, death and rebirth and be grateful for the gift you have been given in this life" (p. 21). Learning through life's experiences is an important aspect for Butterfly's growth throughout the story.

Love.

When we speak of love, we "speak well of each other" (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, p. 63) and understand that "to know love is to know peace" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64). Love appears in many ways throughout my dissertation novel. We can see love in Butterfly's love for her family, love for her kitten Sir Didymus, love for her boyfriend Tristan, and, certainly, love for herself. Butterfly's love for her family is evident in the daily interactions she has with them, through the remorse she feels upon Saagaate's death. We see love for her sister Ettie in that when she overhears a conversation between Ettie and her mother about Val, Butterfly does her best not to tell anyone about it (p. 143). But Butterfly does empathize with Ettie and finds a way to help Ettie through her situation when Butterfly should not know about it. This occurs when Butterfly places Sir Didymus in Ettie's lap one night (p. 150). The love for her kitten Sir Didymus is evident in how she takes care of the kitten, feeding and filling the water bowl and cleaning out his cat litter (p. 103, 126, 141), and her gentle and snuggling interactions with the kitten (p. 100, 103, 104, 110, 116, 155, 164, 165). Even Tristan can see Butterfly's love for Sir Didymus in this scene,

Sir Didymus was curled in a corner of the window seat, sleeping.

His soft, rhythmic breathing even made me feel relaxed. I gave him a gentle pet on his side, earning a soft kitten groan as he creaked open his

eyes, stretched his front paws at me, his paws brushing against my arm as he did so. He groggily stood up and walked onto my lap and curled back up again. Tristan was sitting beside me and chuckled.

‘You two seem very attached,’ he smiled and reached across me to pet Sir Didymus. Sir Didymus groaned a little groan again and, when Tristan had his fill of kitten pets, Sir Didymus stretched again, his little toes stretching out too, and fell quickly back asleep.

‘He’s the best kitten. He’s really gentle and cute and cuddly. He’s really clingy with me, curls up in my lap all the time, and he purrs really loudly. I love the sound of his purr. He is the best gift I’ve ever got,’ I replied. (pp. 164-165)

As an example of one scene of the interactions between Butterfly and Sir Didymus, it is clear that the cat feels safe around Butterfly and, from a human perspective, loves her. This love between human and animals shows us that love happens when there is respect and humility. Benton-Banai (1988) writes that we should honour all creation, that we are no better or no less important than anything else. This idea translates into the relationship with Butterfly and Sir Didymus. She loves her kitten and treats him with kindness and respect.

We see the relationship between Butterfly and Tristan grows throughout the novel. At first, she does not see him when she is preoccupied with another boy at school. Then Butterfly becomes uncomfortable around Tristan and does not want to sit beside him in Science class (p. 79). After a short while, she becomes unsure of her feelings about him (pp. 100-101). As the two begin to know each other better, Butterfly trusts and confides

in him as she shares her feelings about Saagaate's death and her guilt surrounding the tragic event (p. 121-124), and later about her finger cutting (pp. 113-114, 123). In the same demonstration of trust, Tristan also shares his own experiences, and their trust in each other becomes strong. We see how love as a teaching can help a person develop and become whole (especially when we see connections to all of the other Seven Grandfather Teachings). We also see throughout the novel how Butterfly grows to love Tristan. She slowly becomes physically affectionate with him: she first kisses him lightly (p. 124), she feels comfortable when he's physically close to her and touches her affectionately and there is an acknowledgement of their dating (p. 132, 133, 138), and their passion grows (p. 162, 165). We see love for Tristan in the scene with the Windigo when Butterfly declares her love for Tristan (p. 152), but especially when Butterfly acknowledges it to herself outside of the dream (p. 161). We also see mutual respect when Tristan and Butterfly work together and listen to each other's suggestions when they create an assignment for Music class (pp. 161-162, 169). These are all ways that show their love for each other. Bouchard and Martin (2009) write, "you cannot love another until you first learn to love yourself" (p. 26). Butterfly's love for herself is demonstrated when she decides not to cut her fingers anymore and we can see her feeling guilt or shame for having done so (pp. 121-124). After Butterfly encounters the Windigo and overcomes her depression, she develops a sense of peace as well and becomes more balanced—she has learned to love herself (Benton-Banai, 1988; Lane, et al, 1985).

In Tristan's song, he composes three Tankas which represent his feelings for Butterfly,

When I first saw your eyes
Fathomless, drawing me in

I can't resist you
My sultry, sweet addition
Don't refuse me, my heart's yours
Your touch desired
Caressing, slow temptation
Don't tease me or leave
I beg, just bring me closer
Don't refuse me, my heart's yours
I'll follow you there
The ends of the earth, I go
Just let my heart in
My Siren, I live for you
Don't refuse me, my heart's yours. (pp. 137-138)

In the first Tanka, the song's lyrics illustrate Tristan's first impression of Butterfly and how he was drawn to her. We see this early connection when Butterfly's group of friends goes to the theatre. When they leave, Butterfly and Tristan stop to talk, "When Tristan paused longer to look at me, his mouth open in mid-thought, he leaned in to me, his chest lightly brushing my shoulder. He whispered. His voice was gentle" (p. 78). Tristan's gentleness with Butterfly is evident. We see his interest in the way he leans in to Butterfly and how his shoulder touches her. We also see this interest in their discussion,

As the movie ended, Tristan and I chatted a little about the scenes we liked best. Apparently he had read the book too—to better critique the movie as it was based on a book. Or so he said. I think he just secretly liked the stories like I did. I was distracted slightly by the way his short curls wove around the bottom of his ear lobe, daring me to twist my finger around

them. Tristan and I hung back a little as the rest of the group moved forward out of the theatre. (p. 78)

Although we can see how Tristan is interested in Butterfly, it is clear too that Butterfly sees that Tristan is attractive. We see Tristan's interest in Butterfly too when he sits next to her in Science class,

The beginning of the school week was going by quietly enough for me until Wednesday when someone was sitting in the stool in Science where Zoe usually sat. Tristan. Zoe was over in Tristan's seat near the back of the class, grinning at me, laughing through her teeth. *Really?* I slid awkwardly onto my usual stool and took a look at Tristan who was gripped in silent laughter. (p. 79)

Tristan and Zoe have conspired to set Butterfly up with Tristan, but Butterfly is not impressed by it at first. Her incredulity about this is clear when she thinks "really?".

The second Tanka demonstrates how Tristan wants to be closer to Butterfly and how she resists his closeness by limiting their physical contact to hand-holding or light kissing. We also see Butterfly's growing affection towards Tristan when she becomes jealous that Zoe had spoken to him about her (p. 100). In that same discussion, we also see how Tristan's affection for Butterfly has grown when he keeps a kitten from his cat's litter to give to Butterfly (pp. 99-101). The fact that Tristan also wrote Butterfly a note about the kitten and wrote his phone number in it, demonstrates an active interest in Butterfly,

I hope you like the kitten. I saved him just for you—I made sure my Mom didn't give him away. I hope you're doing okay with everything. I'd love it if you could give me a call sometime.

It was a note from Tristan. He had also written his phone number. His name was scrawled in big, messy letters at the bottom. I wasn't sure if I would or if I wanted to call him. (p. 100)

We also are told of Tristan's interest in Butterfly. Butterfly, who is initially skeptical of Tristan, is told the truth by her friend Laurel. We see this in their conversation,

'I guess . . . I'm just not sure if he actually likes me or if he's just being nice,' there, I said it.

'Ohh,' Laurel's eyes widened. 'Well he isn't Erik. Tristan really likes you. Honest. He even told me and Zoe this morning when we picked up the cat.'

'Well, I'll go out with him but only if you all come too . . . the first time at least,' my shyness crept through, flags and banners waving. Zoe and Laurel rolled their eyes. (p. 101)

Butterfly's shyness and hesitation about entering into a relationship is turned around with the support of her friends and her trust in them. We see Butterfly's trust in Tristan grow and her shyness dissipate after she and Tristan talk about the difficulties they have faced and how they have tried to overcome the deaths of family members (pp. 122-124). We also see that in letting herself learn to feel affection for others, she is overcoming her grief and depression. Their first kiss is in indication of Tristan's affection for Butterfly, of Butterfly's affection (both privately and publically) and her growing trust in Tristan (p. 124).

The third Tanka is a metaphor for Tristan's love for Butterfly and a clear indication that he would do anything for her. When Carol confronts Butterfly about how

she was not accepting Sacha's apology, Carol explains some of the challenges Sacha has been facing at home (pp. 129-130). Seeing this conversation escalate, Tristan steps in: "That doesn't give Sacha the right to act like she does though, you know?" . . . I turned to look at his face that had become serious from the conversation, his eyebrows furrowed slightly" (p. 130). We begin to see here that Tristan is becoming protective of Butterfly. Later, we also see an indication of how he is physically attracted to her when Butterfly arrives at the school in time for their music performance,

As I joined my friends, they turned and stared, slack-jawed. I looked down at my satin dress, the bow at my ribcage still how I knotted it. I touched my styled hair. Nothing seemed out of place.

'What?!' I finally blurted, annoyed and exasperated.

Tristan stepped forward, smiling. He chortled a little, 'You just look gorgeous, that's all.' (p. 135)

Tristan's declaration of Butterfly's beauty is also clear in the Tanka. He refers to her as a Siren, the mythical creature that would sing to men in ships and cause them to jump overboard and die. The reference to the Siren is not to indicate that Butterfly will lure Tristan to his death as Sirens tend to do in the myths, but that she is irresistible to Tristan and he would do anything for her.

We see Butterfly's appreciation for this poem in her response to Tristan,

Tristan, wonderful Tristan, wrote this song just for me. I was beaming. I moved to the front and hugged Tristan, beaming and becoming a bit emo so that I had to whisper, 'Thank you. It was so wonderful . . . Sounds

complicated. But it really was beautiful,' I smiled and rewarded him with a kiss on the lips. (p. 138)

Love is complicated and can never been demonstrated in one or two events. Love, in this novel, is shown in many ways through behaviours and actions of the characters in the story. The demonstration of love is a sum of their actions. But love is not just derived from behaviours. As I represent love in the dissertation novel, it is about fearlessness. Being fearless in opening yourself up to another person and trusting in them. It is also about loving someone for who they are, their strengths and good qualities, and also their flaws and weaknesses. It is about accepting someone for who they are without feeling a need to change who they are or to change their behaviours that you do not personally like. In this, it is also about respecting who they are as a person. We see this in the relationship with Tristan and Butterfly; they accept each other's histories and support each other. We see this love with Butterfly's family who are each unique and have their own personal traits.

These themes within the novel not only had to be included in good ways, but also in ways that were appropriate to a young adult novel for ages fourteen to eighteen. For instance, when we think of the relationship between Butterfly and Tristan, their love could only be shown in ways that were not overtly explicit. I show them kissing, hugging, and holding hands. In addition, I did not want the scene with Windigo to be overly gory or violent. I did not want the scene with Windigo to be focused on a physical struggle with lots of physical fighting and blood. This scene was about the emotional and mental struggle to regain one's sense of self and love of self. Concepts of Seven Grandfather Teachings can be shown and learned at younger ages, and we see these teachings occur

around Ishkode (especially in scenes where Cocom shares knowledge with him), but some of the other content (including those examples above and also the scene where Ettie shares the failed relationship with Val to her mother) I felt would not be appropriate for younger elementary aged children. Since my primary characters are of the ages fifteen and sixteen, that is my target age for this story.

Respect.

When we speak of respect, we "honour all of the Creation" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64) and "show respect for all things here on earth, all people, regardless of race or language" (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, p. 63). Respect is shown when Butterfly adopts the kitten but only after her parents approved the adoption of the kitten into their house and family (pp. 100-102). If she had not adopted the kitten, it may have been brought to the pound. This essential saving of a creature shows Butterfly's respect for life, even though she begins losing respect for hers (Benton-Banai, 1988). We also see respect when Cocom talks with Ish after he had ripped a branch off of the tree in the backyard and how she teaches him about showing respect to trees,

'What if everyone did that to the tree?' Cocom asked him. He shrugged and I could see in the slump of his shoulders that he knew he had done something he shouldn't have.

'Then maybe the tree would have no branches left on it?' Ish wiggled his snow boot on the hard packed snow of one of the few winding paths in the back yard. "Sorry."

...

'No,' Ish replied. 'Can I say sorry to the tree?'

'If you want to. But, maybe we can use the branch in something and we can thank the tree,' Cocom said as she took a small bundle from her jacket pocket. She unwrapped it, pulled off a piece of ribbon, took a pinch of tobacco from the bundle and placed it into Ish's open palm.

'What do I do?' he asked, looking earnestly up into her face.

'Face east, and put the tobacco at the base of the tree. We shall thank the tree,' Cocom said. (pp. 166-167)

The laying down of tobacco is a way to say thank you for gifts from nature. Giving thanks is a way to show respect. Bouchard and Martin (2009) write of respect that we should "not waste. Use all things wisely. Never take more than you need and always give away that which you do not use" (p. 14). We see this type of respect when Butterfly and her family go hunting up in their traditional lands and all of the moose is used and handled with respect (pp. 84-90).

Bouchard and Martin also write that we should "treat others as you would have them treat you, respectfully" (p. 14). Contrary to this idea, we see a lack of respect shown by Sacha and Carol whose bullying and prejudiced attitude hurt Butterfly. As a result, Butterfly has a difficult time dealing with Sacha and actively avoids having to speak with her. Likewise, Butterfly has a lack of respect for Sacha and Carol, especially after they verbally attack her, and chooses to avoid them in the hallways and refuses to accept their apology (p. 108, 129, 130). We see Butterfly's change in attitude after her father Donal speaks with Butterfly about needing to accept the apology from Sacha. Donal advises Butterfly to discontinue avoiding the situation and to accept the apology and suggests that it would be good for her to forgive (pp. 131-132). In this scene with Butterfly and her

father Donal, we see the teaching of respect in that respect means we consider ourselves equal to all things, no better and no less. By accepting the apology (p. 170), Butterfly is able to enact the teaching of respect.

Bravery.

When we speak of bravery, there is an understanding that "there will be a time when you have problems. So never let go what has been given to you" (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, p. 63) and when we "face the foe with integrity" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64) or when we can "face fear and danger" (Bouchard and Martin, 2009, p. 16) that too is to be brave. Butterfly demonstrates bravery through actions in situations that are out of the norm or at an extreme for her. We see these when Butterfly saves herself from the Windigo (pp. 151-154) and when she confronts Sacha in her school (p. 170). Facing these two essential enemies, Sacha and the Windigo, also shows Butterfly's ability to be honest with herself and the situation she is in (Benton-Banai, 1988). I can say that it was brave of Butterfly to not accept Sacha's apology because she felt it was insincere and because she was not ready to accept it. But Butterfly was not respectful in her treatment of Sacha. We know that during this time period after Sacha's prejudiced insult, Butterfly is imbalanced—she is becoming depressed and she feels guilty over Saagaate's death. Because she is imbalanced in mind, body, spirit, and emotions, she is unable to handle situations to the best of her abilities and to make good choices.

We also see bravery when Butterfly confesses to Ettie about overhearing her conversation about her ex-boyfriend, and talks with her about it (p. 159). Butterfly knows that she should not have overheard the conversation between Ettie and her mother (p. 143). She stops herself from telling her best friends about it (p. 143), and empathizes with

Ettie's situation (p. 144). We can assume here that Ettie's approaching Butterfly about this situation was brave, because ignoring it may have been easier to do. We also see bravery when Zoe tells her family and friends, including Butterfly, that she is a lesbian (p. 145). Not everyone may have been as accepting of Zoe, so sharing this was very brave of Zoe. Bravery, however, is not about taking risks that could endanger your life. We knew there was risk when Saagaate and Paul walked on the path that took them near the edge of the cliff; but this was not bravery.

Honesty.

When we speak of honesty, we know that "honesty in facing a situation is to be brave" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64) and we are guided by "liv[ing] the right, honest way, to speak well of your fellow man [and to] think through whatever life brings" (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, pp. 63-64). We are given suggestions that there may be something other than friendship between Zoe and Cala (p. 118, 136). When Zoe "comes out" she is not only being honest to herself, but to those she loves: her friends and family,

'Okay. Um. Well. I . . . err. Well Cala, you know her, she's been eating lunch with us?'

'Yeah, of course I know Cala . . .'

'I'm kind of hanging out with her. Like, um, we're seeing each other. We're dating. Going out,' she said it all in a rush, unsure about how to tell it to me. 'I'm gay.' She breathed out heavily, her breath causing a rush of loud air into the phone.

'Okay,' I wasn't sure how else to tell her I was okay with it aside from saying Okay. I wasn't sure if she wanted me to say anything else.

'You tell your Mom and Dad?'

'Yeah, they're okay with it and everything. They said they always figured. How annoying,' Zoe sounded lighter all of a sudden.

'You're happy then? Happier telling people?' I asked.

'Oh. Um. Yeah. Definitely. I feel like I can be more myself. I don't have to like hide anymore, I guess,' she said. (p. 145)

In this scene we can see clearly that Zoe accepts herself for who she is and is honest with herself (Bouchard and Martin, p. 10). Despite Laurel telling Butterfly the confession from Zoe before Zoe called Butterfly (pp. 143-144), Butterfly waits until Zoe is ready to tell Butterfly herself (p. 145). In telling her friends and family that she was gay, we hear that Zoe feels happier about it (p. 145). We know that her friends have no issue with this either when Cala accompanies Zoe to events with her friends with no difference from the other partners in the group.

When Butterfly tells Tristan about her finger cutting and of her dreams and the bruises she develops on her body, we can see that being honest can also be seen as brave (pp. 123, 162-163). When Ettie tells her mother about her boyfriend, expressing something as personal as that can be seen as honesty (p. 142). When we speak of honesty in these situations, we see the sincerity behind the actions and words of the characters.

We see honesty too when Butterfly accepts Sacha's apology. Many reasons drive Butterfly to accept Sacha's apology: her Dad's honest discussion with Butterfly about the need to move on and forgive, and that she did not want to continue dragging out the event

and involving the Principal in it for the rest of the year. Butterfly is honest with Sacha in telling her about her own feelings about Sacha's behaviour, and that she could not forgive her. Being honest allows Butterfly to move on from the situation.

Although being honest is not always the easiest, we can get a sense here that it is often for the best and can make potentially bad situations easier to handle.

Humility.

When we speak of humility, we try to "live in harmony and balance on earth. One should not think himself above others, while walking here on earth" (Buswa & Shawana, 1994, p. 64) and that essentially "we know [ourselves] as a sacred part of the Creation" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64). The Teaching of humility can be seen in the dissertation in a few examples. One example of humility can be seen when Sacha apologizes to Butterfly. After having verbally accosting her, in a racist and prejudiced way, Sacha is required to apologize to Butterfly (pp. 75-76). Sacha's first attempt to apologize to Butterfly was a failure,

‘I don't accept your apology,’ I said. Zoe huffed a laugh through her nose.

‘But, you have to!’ Sacha yelled. ‘I went through so much shit because of you and I have to talk to all these stupid people and I have detention every day during lunch and after school until I apologize to you and you have to accept it.’

‘Well too bad. I don't accept it. You shouldn't have been so nasty. There wasn't a need for it. There was no good reason for what you said to me in the first place! I don't know if you're racist or what, but you don't

speaking to people like that, ever, and especially when they haven't done anything to you to deserve anything like you did to me!' I was yelling, rushing through my words, furious, my throat becoming sore. I cried when I was furious and angry. I couldn't help it. But now, I tried not to cry. I was so furious.

'You're ruining my life, you fucking squaw!' Sacha bellowed, the tears flowing down her cheeks. She pushed past me, raced down the hallway. The art teacher popped her head out of her classroom door, probably having heard Sacha, and watched as Sacha ran past her, and, presumably, out of the school. (p. 130)

Although Sacha faces humility from the refused acceptance of her apology, we know that Butterfly could have accepted the apology and moved on. Her refusal to accept it, partly because she feels it was insincere and rushed, however, demonstrates how deeply hurt and pained she still feels about the whole event; she is not ready to accept apologies and move on. Later, we see that Butterfly is able to have a discussion with Sacha in a respectful way, knowing that she should not place herself above others (Benton-Banai, 1988); we can see this as an example of humility (p. 170). When Butterfly saves herself from the Windigo as she did, she demonstrates that she "does not live for herself but for [her family]" (Bouchard and Martin, 2009, p. 2). Butterfly knows herself "as a sacred part of the Creation" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64). She knows she belongs in this world and that there are people who love her and want her in their lives. We also see humility when Butterfly receives her mark for her music assignment; she does not brag about it or gloat (pp. 169-170) especially when she sees a peer's unremarkable mark.

Truth.

The final of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, truth means that one should understand and know all of the Grandfather teachings (Benton-Banai, 1988; Buswa & Shawana, 1994). For Butterfly, identifying if she has developed the truth is in knowing each of the Seven Grandfather Teachings varies depending on each situation. Facing the truth about her finger cutting helps Butterfly realize that she needs to talk to friends and the counselor until she is content and able to heal through journal entries alone.

Butterfly is given the journal by her Mother who suggests that she vent her feelings and frustrations in it (pp. 115-116). Butterfly acknowledges the helpfulness of the journal to the school counselor Ms. Makowski (p. 128) and lets her know that she would be discontinuing visits with her (p. 128). As Butterfly begins to heal from the inside, she begins to make an effort to write positive things in her diary (p. 138). In a cathartic moment with her sister Ettie, they both burn their journals as a way to expel the darkness and depression from their lives (p. 172). It is at this point that Ettie tells Butterfly that her mother had given them both new spiral bound journals with the hopes that they would be filled with positive things (p. 172). From then on, Butterfly makes an effort to be positive and write of positive things (p. 172). We can infer that Butterfly is thankful for this change in mindset. And when we are thankful, "good will come to you and to those you love" (Bouchard and Martin, 2009, p. 22).

Butterfly also learns the truth about her dreams and the characters she sees in them and outside in her real world when she speaks with her Cocom. She recognizes the characters eventually for who they are and learns from her Cocom that although she does see them, it does not need to be negative or a bad omen:

‘Do you know of a man in the sacred stories who appears in people’s dreams or talks with humans and gets them to do things but not really?’ I whispered at her a few moments later.

Cocom furrowed her brows as she thought, and turned to me. ‘Not anyone who specifically visits dreams. But a trickster who can look human. He gets humans to do things, or to cause things to happen. Why?’

‘I’ve been dreaming about him. I think he hides from me. But he talks to me. I . . . I think I saw him from my bedroom window before. He was throwing rocks up at my window.’ Cocom stared at me still, probably wondering if I was lying or joking.

‘Try to stay away from him if you can. He’s a trickster, that one there. We call him Weesquachak,’ she said to me. She had leaned forward and was whispering like I was. Then, she turned back to watch her decorating show.

In my room, I practiced saying his name, Wees-ka-chak.

Weesquachak the Trickster. (p. 116)

Butterfly sees Weesquachak quite often in her dreams. In learning the truth about Weesquachak Butterfly is better able to acknowledge other sacred story characters that she sees. For instance, Butterfly sees the Apa’chininiichug in a bush around her front yard and her Cocom says that it was done so Butterfly could purposefully see them and that it was a privilege to see them (p. 110). Also, when Butterfly sees a man cut a woman’s head off, but the head continues to roll around, Cocom tells Butterfly that it was the Rolling Head (p. 134). Butterfly respects Cocom’s thoughts and she respects her as if

she were a recognized Elder in the family. It is this respect that allows Butterfly to accept Cocom's words and wisdom without question. However Cocom does warn Butterfly to "let [her] know if things come a bit too close" (p. 135). We can infer that Cocom warns Butterfly to let her know when characters from sacred story come too close to her in her real life.

Finally, in acknowledging that Butterfly does feel and love many people in her life (pp. 152-153), she is able to accept the truth about her growth and changes as a person. This last act, when she faces Windigo and uses her feelings of love for others and herself to save her, can be seen as a demonstration of facing the truth of oneself (pp. 152-153). The Windigo can be seen as a personification of her depression and self-destructive cutting. Her defeat of the Windigo is also a metaphorical defeat of her depression and cutting. Overcoming the Windigo allows Butterfly to be able to continue on with her life in a positive way.

I feel the urge to point out here that while I may have written in the Teachings through the above events, they can be seen in other areas throughout the dissertation novel. And while I've only pointed out these seven examples above, you may also choose to disagree with some of them. In keeping with oral tradition and the tradition of Seven Grandfather Teachings, we all see and hear the teachings that we need at the time.

Immersing Myself in Sacred Story Characters

Sacred Story Characters

Essential to my dissertation are characters from sacred stories. Sacred stories, as a category, fit into a traditional oral discourse that Ellis (1995) describes in his book on *Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* as

Often repeated and familiar narrative which may belong to a well-known body or canon of traditional accounts [in which] animals and birds talked, [where] themes recur in the oral literature of related language communities where the leading [characters] may have different names, [where] 'moral' tales share a common thread of instructive purpose, [and where] the action described belongs to the realm of the fanciful. (pp. xix-xxii)

The characters from the sacred stories I draw upon not only fit into the above description, but they help to convey many of the themes and issues that I discuss throughout the novel portion of my dissertation. The characters Weesquachak, Windigo, Chakabesh, and Iyas appear from high-level or Traditional Discourse sacred story. When I represent these Traditional Discourse characters in my dissertation novel, I am doing so in a way where the characters are taken out of their realm of sacred story and placed within a story of my own creation. I keep those characters as true to their story-selves as I can, and try to represent them as appropriately and respectfully as possible. Weesquachak stories, like those of Nanabush, can at first seem to describe how something came to be; they also describe how something came to be changed, like in the story of why rabbits have long ears (Odjig, 2007b).

When reading the dissertation novel, you would have seen Weesquachak (the trickster), Windigo, Chakabesh, the Younger Sister, Apa'chininiichug (little people), Rolling Head, Iyas and the Fox, Nanabush, and the Proud Maiden. Some of these characters play greater roles within the novel section than others, but how often they appear is not intended to reflect on their importance as sacred story characters within Ojibwe and Cree story. Rather, how the characters appear and how often they do is

determined by how and when Butterfly *needs* to see them. Just as we gain teachings from hearing stories, we also gain them only when we are ready to hear them; Butterfly gains these teachings from sacred stories as she interacts with or sees sacred story characters. It is as if Butterfly herself is on the outskirts of a sacred story, watching and listening to it—somewhat of a paradox when we are watching and listening to her, just as another character is watching and listening to her within the novel.

Weesquachak.

Weesquachak, a trickster character, is probably one of the most complex characters in sacred stories. Weesquachak, especially as a trickster, is written about greatly and in many ways and forms by Aboriginal writers. In Thomas King's children's book *Coyote's New Suit* (2004), King writes of the trickster Coyote who, when Raven causes Coyote to doubt his confidence in the colour and texture of his fur, proceeds to steal and then try on other animal's furs and steals and tries on human clothing. After he had collected all of the furs and clothes, he holds a yard sale,

So the human beings tried on the animal suits, and while they weren't as comfortable as human being clothing, everyone had to admit that the suits were soft and luxurious. But just as the human beings were getting used to their new suits, the animals came into the clearing, dressed in their human-being clothes. (King, p. 28)

So Coyote had caused all of the animals and all of the humans to argue about their furs and clothing and eventually "the animals and the human beings gathered up their suits and their clothes and stomped off" (King, p. 32). Coyote eventually decides he likes his fur again—that is, until he sees bear's "impressive" fur (King, p. 36). Here we can see

how Coyote causes trouble for the animals and humans simply for his own initial interests.

Ruby Slipperjack's *Weesquachak* (2005) presents Weesquachak as a being that is aloof from humans, who hides in the distance and only speaks to the characters for personal gain and entertainment. In *Weesquachak*, Weesquachak can transform into a dog. Slipperjack presents this in the following,

Finally, I cleared the creek and ran all the way up the hill. When I paused a moment to catch my breath, I looked behind me and saw the black and white dog. The silly dog was coming up to me wagging his tail . . . I heard the dog's tail brushing the snow, the sound of my hard breathing, the loud thumping of my heart and then the tears came. (Slipperjack, pp. 65-66)

We can also see how Weesquachak interferes in the lives of humans. We see this in a passage from Slipperjack's novel in which Weesquachak wants the protagonist Janine as his own and finds ways to cause the men in Janine's life to leave. The first instance in Slipperjack's text occurs when Weesquachak is able to find a way to have Janine by transforming into a man named Keith, "Well, this white man thing seems to have come to an end. So, I will be her handsome and dashing Anishinabe who will be so undeniably wonderful and supporting and I will make her love me and be my wife!" (p. 80). Later on in Slipperjack's novel, Weesquachak has also devised way to create a rift between Janine and her steady boyfriend Fred. In this scene, Janine and her boyfriend Fred had been fighting often, she was pregnant, and one night when he left her alone on the trap line she began to have a miscarriage. By the time she arrived at the hospital, the baby had died and she decided she no longer wanted Fred in her life. We see Weesquachak happy at the

thought of having and keeping Janine all to himself, "I've got her now! She's mine! You see, I took care of Fred. I took that baby too. I want her all to myself. All to myself. All to myself. All to myself" (p. 168). Just as in Ray and Stevens' (2003) sacred story where Weesquachak thoughtlessly kills a baby when it had gone to the bathroom in its pants and because he could not keep up with its antics (p. 36), we also see Weesquachak's inability to sympathize with the loss of loved ones because he is focused solely on his own interests. We have also seen Weesquachak's desire to have women for wives and how he will interfere in the lives of humans in order to gain his desires. Ray and Stevens (2003) show this facet of Weesquachak's character in the sacred story "The Secret Name" in which Weesquachak desires the beautiful daughter of the chief:

The word of the great feast spread up the rivers to all the Anishinabek in the northern forests. Many would come to the feast to try and guess her name. The maiden was not concerned however, because only one person besides her father knew her name and that was her lover . . . One day Wee-sa-kay-jac heard two Anishinabek discussing the great contest. His curiosity aroused, Wee-sa-kay-jac decided to find out the secret name of the maiden and take her as his woman. (p. 33)

Weesquachak, wanting to know the maiden's name, asks the spider to spy on her. When the spider finds out her name, he is concerned that it will take him too long to get back to Weesquachak, so he asks weasel to share this knowledge with Weesquachak and tells the weasel her name. The weasel decides to use the knowledge for himself and enters the contest, winning the claim to the maiden (Ray & Stevens, p. 34). When Weesquachak finds out that weasel betrayed him, he confronts the maiden's father:

But the great Wee-sa-kay-jac was angry. He vowed revenge upon the deceitful, cunning, wily weasel. So Wee-sa-kay-jac went off to tell Big Nose [the maiden's father] of the trick played by weasel. When Big Nose heard of the weasel's treachery he called the marriage off. . . Forever-and-forever [the maiden] would now be free to choose whoever she desired.
(pp. 34-35)

Although there is not a sense that Weesquachak wants Butterfly as his own, we know that if he is appearing to her and speaking with her, then there may be something that he wants from her or that he wants to be involved in her life for some reason. We do not find out the reasons behind Weesquachak's presence in Butterfly's life because this story is not about Weesquachak and it is not from his point of view. However, I can suggest that his appearance to Butterfly through dreams allows him the opportunity to get her used to him before she sees him in her real world. The fact that he makes recurring visits to Butterfly suggests he is curious about her. Since he is known to cause mischief and playing tricks on humans, not for the purpose of causing harm but simply because he is being true to his character traits, I will let you consider that he may have been the one to cause some of the problems in Butterfly's life. For instance, was there something deeper behind Sacha insulting Butterfly other than because she saw her with Erik a few times and already has a dislike for her; was Sacha further influenced by something that took place outside of the scenes that were presented?

Steve Sanderson's (2006) graphic novel *Darkness Calls* provides a close connection to the power of will and love of oneself and has many parallels within my dissertation story. In Sanderson's work, we see a story about a teenage boy named Kyle

who experiences some bullying and was looking forward to art class when there was a note posted on the class door about students being required to go to the gym (p. 8). We see this connection in my story with Sacha bullying Butterfly and saying prejudiced slurs at her. In addition, Sanderson's work also includes an Elder who comes to visit the school. Sanderson's Elder speaks to the students about respect and talks about Weesquachak:

I wanna talk to you about respect and about the old ways. Old stories we pass on to each other. About Wesakecak, the trickster, and what he teaches us about ourselves. The way he looks is really up to the imagination of the storyteller. Sometimes he's an old man. Sometimes, he's young. He can be a raven or a coyote. Anything he needs to tell us his story. (p. 9)

Inspired by the Elder, Kyle makes a sketch of Weesquachak, but is quickly discouraged when a teacher disciplines him for drawing during the Elder's talking. It is apparent that Kyle uses drawings as a way to heal, but in a moment of frustration, he tosses them away; A friend gathers them up for him and tries to talk with Kyle about how he has been feeling (pp. 13-16). In some parallels, rather than art, Butterfly uses a journal to vent; she also sees a counselor in school for a while until she decides she no longer wants to visit with her anymore. Just as Sanderson's Elder tells Kyle that "it's a really good idea – using your art as a way to keep the stories alive" (p. 22) when he passes him the sketch of Weesquachak, Butterfly's counselor and her mother advise her to use writing to keep her spirits alive and let out the dark. In Sanderson's end scene, we see the Elder leave, and Kyle escorts him out of the house; we see images of a truck leaving and then Weesquachak on a motorcycle leaving in the same direction (p. 48). We are given the

impression that it has been Weesquachak the whole time in the form of the Elder.

Although Butterfly sees Weesquachak from the beginning of my story in her dreams, he does not speak to her until later, and he does not show more of his true abilities until he causes the caterpillars to go through the metamorphosis into butterflies. In Sanderson's work and mine, both characters realize a sense of care and love for themselves and choose to live their lives (Farrell-Morneau, Dissertation, pp. 151-154; Sanderson pp. 44-45).

In both my story and Sanderson's comic, Weesquachak is seen more positively than in traditional sacred stories. For instance, when we see Weesquachak killing the baby for relieving itself (Ray & Stevens, 2003), we see a cruel side to his character. We also see Weesquachak's selfishness in Ruby Slipperjack's novel *Weesquachak* in which he becomes determined to claim the protagonist for his wife and does whatever he can to reach those ends, including taking the form of a human being in order to try and seduce her.

For a contemporary Indigenous young adult audience, I wanted to show a version of Weesquachak that focused more on the positive attributes that are evident in sacred stories: *Wesakachak and the Flood* by Ray and Stevens (2003) is an example that demonstrates Weesquachak's kinder side when he asks Muskrat to try to swim to the ocean depths. When Muskrat comes back to the surface, he has died, but had also retrieved a grain of sand. In his next actions, we see Weesquachak's esteem for life, "In a last attempt, Wee-sa-kay-jac sent Wa-jusk, the muskrat, into the ocean. The vine went down and down. When he finally pulled the muskrat up, he discovered that Wa-jusk had drowned, but in his tiny paws was a piece of clay. Wee-sa-kay-jac was so happy that

he immediately brought the three swimmers back to life" (p. 24). We also see his common sense come through in the story of how the moon came to be (Ray and Stevens, 2003). In this story, Weesquachak brings lightness to earth again. The sun has not been rising for many months and Weesquachak sees that it is harming the humans and animals and plants on earth. Ray and Stevens present the story;

Below on earth, Anishinabek and animals stared into the black sky waiting for geezis to send his warm light to them and they were frightened because they knew they could not live without the sun.

Wee-sa-kay-jac was travelling in the forest and he realizes something was wrong. Obviously, the sky people were not looking after the sun. In the form of binay-sih [a Thunderbird], he flew into the floating clouds to see what had happened. When Wee-sa-kay-jac arrived he found the children fighting. Angrily he spoke to them . . .

‘And you quarrel and fight while there is blackness on the earth below. How foolish, sky children. You must be punished,’ Wee-sa-kay-jac told them bitterly. (p. 27)

As punishment, Weesquachak informs them that they will always be separated from each other, with the brother in charge of tending to the sun, and the sister tending to moon which “will burn only in the darkness of night and will be very difficult to keep aflame” (p. 27). The siblings would only see each other “a few days of the year when they cross each other in the sky” (p. 27). I recognize that Weesquachak spends much of his time playing tricks on animals and humans or teasing them—not admirable qualities—but it is the respect for life that I also see in him and included in my portrayal of him. We see the

same characteristic in Sanderson's work when Weesquachak encourages Kyle to keep up with his art because of how good his art is, and tells him that it is he who can defeat the Windigo. In both mine and Sanderson's work, Weesquachak uses his efforts to ensure the protagonists will not take their own lives.

Butterfly's experiences with tragedy and self-harm echo facts of real-life experiences many Indigenous youth experience. Kristina Fagan (2009) says that writers "use storytelling to explore connections between the traumatic past and troubles in the present and to self-reflexively examine the potential and limits of such indirect and humorous communication" (pp. 204-205). In this regard, we continuously see Butterfly attempting to find humour or joy in her experiences. Butterfly becomes even more saddened or frustrated when her smiles continue to be only the façade of a smile and not the reflection of how she wants to be feeling (p. 99, 107, 111, 113, 118).

Indigenous researchers like Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Kristina Fagan (2009), and Judy Iseke-Barnes (2009) have also used trickster figures in their research and understanding. In Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (2008), she uses Coyote as a way to broaden her understandings; he "helps [her] to reflect and to gain understandings, challenging and comforting me just like a critical friend" (p. 6). She also writes that, "how Coyote sees the world and comes to make sense of it through interrelationships is critical to understanding the lessons that I learned about Indigenous storywork" (p. 7). Kristina Fagan's (2009) article "Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson," draws connections between the story of Weesquachak killing a Windigo and trauma. Fagan writes, "through the story

of Weetigo and Weesageechak, [there are] complex theoretical issues about the connections between childhood trauma, self-destructive patterns, art, and communication" (p. 219). We see this connection between Weesquachak and trauma in my dissertation novel when he helps Butterfly realize who she is and that she can cause change in her life,

He stepped back and smiled then. He stood there. So still I didn't think he was moving. Then he looked sideways and waved his arm through the air towards the forest.

In one swift movement, the butterflies moved up from around me, thousands, moving around the sky above us and around the trees . . .

I turned to the Trickster then and smiled. It seemed like a gift, watching all of this. But what was the catch?

He looked at me.

'You are in these butterflies,' he mouthed. He smiled that feral smile.

I thought about what he meant. I thought of what I had just seen. I pictured myself as a butterfly. (pp. 139-140)

Symbolically, we see how Weesquachak is showing Butterfly how she has changed and will continue to change until she is complete and whole. With this symbolism, we also see a connection with the medicine wheel teachings that show the development of the human from birth to death, and from infancy to old age. When Butterfly can picture herself as a butterfly, she knows that she has the ability to change and that she has the will to cause change in her life (Lane, et al, 1985).

Judy Iseke-Barnes, in her article "Unsettling Fictions: Disrupting Popular Discourses and Trickster Tales in Books for Children" (2009) writes on the role of trickster or Coyote in education settings and their effects on understandings developed through readings in the classroom. Iseke-Barnes writes, "Trickster typically has some human and some superhuman characteristics and possibly some animal characteristics as well that allow him to get into situations that otherwise would not be possible thus allowing stories to consider complex cultural, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual domains" (pp. 33-34). Although it is not trickster himself in my dissertation story that gets into situations, he has an effect on Butterfly through her dreams that permeate into her real world. Weesquachak then is "a creature both creator and human, living and spirit, [who] is accessible not as fantasy but as part of the real" (Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 48).

As a character in sacred story, Weesquachak is in many ways like humans—complex. Sometimes shy other times witty and excitable; he is mean, but also humourous; selfish and greedy, but also generous. But, unlike any other character appearing in sacred story or other types of narratives in Ojibwe and Cree story, he has the power to cause change. Weesquachak can cause the loon to have a flat behind (Ellis, 1995, pp. 309-310) or "broken" legs (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 38-39), he can transform into a thunderbird and fly into the sky (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20), he feels sadness when a loved one dies (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 21), he can shift into any creature in order to protect himself (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20), he can make humans unable to speak to dogs (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 26), he can create months of winter (Ellis, 1995, p. 28; Sugarhead & O'Meara, 1996, p. 39), he created Anishinawbe people (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 24), and, although he can play tricks and be mischievous and

sometimes make Anishinawbe people angry, he should always be respected (Ellis, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20).

Weesquachak's sense of humour is not always subtle and we often see him finding humour in those things that we find embarrassing. In one instance, we see Weesquachak poking fun at himself passing gas:

[Wee-sa-kay-jac] had hardly fallen asleep when he was aroused suddenly by a noisy "Rrrruup" and a terrible odour. Alarmed, Wee-sa-kay-jac looked around but saw no one. "You stupid rear-end! Waking me up for nothing." Wee-sa-kay-jac kicked his behind several times and then went back to sleep. He had hardly dozed off again when the sound "Rrrruuppooooom," blasted him back into consciousness. Wee-sa-kay-jac jumped to his feet, looking for thieves, but no one could be seen. (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 44)

In Butterfly's dreams, she has the sense that Weesquachak can be dangerous. Her reluctance to be nearer to Weesquachak in her early dreams and the distance that he keeps between them also reflects the idea that Weesquachak can be both gentle and cruel. In the sacred stories, we see his gentleness when he brings back to life the Muskrat who died while bringing some clay from the ocean that Weesquachak uses to create Turtle Island (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 23-24). But we also see his cruelty when, in the story *Wee-sa-kay-jac and the Little Baby* (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 36), an Anishinawbe woman challenges him and says that he could not keep up with her active child. Accepting the task, Weesquachak matched the child's antics throughout the day until the child goes to the bathroom in its pants. His next actions demonstrate his cruelty, "Finally,

Wee-sa-kay-jac was tired, he could not keep up with the activities of the little one [the baby] so he killed him (p. 36). With no guilt for what he had done, nor any inclination to understand the severity of his actions, Weesquachak moves on to his next adventure. The idea of Weesquachak escaping human sight is something I allude to when Butterfly thinks she keeps seeing him out of the corner of her eye, or when she sees an arm or hand in the trees. In Ray and Stevens' (2003) "Wee-sa-kay-jac with the Canada Geese" humans see Weesquachak as a goose and shoot him out of the sky. When they "ran to the place where he fell . . . all they could find was a goose skin. They heard Wee-sa-kay-jac running through the forest, screeching in pain" (p. 41). In Butterfly's dreams of Weesquachak, there is both attraction and fear towards Weesquachak. These emotions are taken from Ray and Stevens' (2003) sacred story "Wee-sa-kay-jac and the Inexperienced Women" in which Weesquachak seduces a camp of women whose men were out hunting (pp. 41-43). In my dissertation novel I tried to blend Weesquachak's behaviours, attitudes and characteristics that I had discussed here.

Weesquachak demonstrates both the good and the bad aspects of himself in his actions throughout the stories. In Anishinawbe culture, we have both good and bad in ourselves, but we often choose between either and show them through our actions (Lane, et al, 1985). Yet, as complex as Weesquachak is and as harsh as he can be, he too has a family. Weesquachak was the third born of four siblings to a mother, O-ma-ma-ma (earth mother) who gave birth to the spirits of the world (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20). Binay-sih the Thunderbird (which is also known as Pinassi in Ojibwe) was the first born who lived high in the sky and would protect the world from the serpent Genay-big; when Thunderbird fought Genay-big or became angry, the clouds become dark, thunder and

lightning flashed, and rain falls (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20). The frog (Oma-ka-ki)—who has a sorcerer's powers and helps to control the insects of the world—is the second eldest (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20). The third to be born is Weesquachak who is gifted with many powers. Weesquachak spends much of his time with the fourth and youngest Ma-heegun/Ma'iingan (the wolf). Weesquachak would make himself very small and ride on Ma-heegun's back (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 20). Both Ray and Stevens (2003) and Ellis (1995) do not describe Weesquachak transforming into Coyote, but his little brother Wolf was often a companion and he often rode his brother's back after changing into a very small person (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 21). I include the wolf in my dissertation novel, suggesting this connection with both wolf and Weesquachak. I write,

A skittering in the bush. A soft crunch a few meters away. I looked to the side.

A wolf.

Grey, white, russet browns. Soft yellow eyes focused on nothing else but me. Yet I didn't feel that I was in any danger. It turned to move away, but then turned back to look at me, silently telling me to follow him.

I followed the wolf to a small clearing. (p. 79)

In keeping with this traditional portrayal of Weesquachak, I have only portrayed him as a "human" character in my dissertation novel, but suggest his possible transformations into coyote or wolf at the end when Butterfly sees one dash into the forest near her home (p. 174).

Understanding the interconnected relationship with land and animals has been a key topic in my dissertation. Knowing that Weesquachak has a deep connection with the land

and all of the creatures and plants and rocks in it, I tried to reflect that in my descriptions of Weesquachak. I tried to portray Weesquachak as someone who looks to some degree like the land itself: he is portrayed with hands that have worked with the earth, who smells of the earth, and who can easily disappear in to the forest. The following descriptions appear in my dissertation story as examples of this connection to land:

His hands were dirty. Dirty like someone who works with the earth, who digs in the earth, whose hands handle earth, whose hands are more a part of the earth than any regular person's are. His hair was long, disheveled, black, moving with the wind rather than being pushed by it. (p. 65)

and:

He turned then and faced me. A sudden comprehension seeped into his eyes. He gave a small smile; it was almost feral, but more mischievous. Then, he turned away again and melted behind a large tree. I walked forward, closer and closer and crept beside the tree. I peered around and was not completely surprised to find him gone. (p. 74)

This connection to land is reflective in *Wee-sa-kay-jac and Kitchi-Assin* from Ray and Stevens (2003):

Wee-sa-kay-jac was running along a leafy, gladed path in the forest. As usual, the supernatural Indian was looking for adventure; but nothing seemed to present an opportunity for him. He had not been able to find any geese, Indians or animals to torment. (p. 30)

We can also see a deeper connection to the land in a story when Weesquachak began to have a race with a large rock and, when it landed on him, he decided to demonstrate his

stubbornness by not moving from the spot until the rock moved first:

Moss and lichens began to grow on the arms, body, and hair of Wee-sa-kay-jac. Leaves fell covering up the prisoner with a golden blanket. Later the snows of winter followed and the Indian suffered terribly from the intense cold. Still the rock had not moved off the legs of its captive. (p. 31)

In my portrayal of Weesquachak, I try to portray Weesquachak with the same character traits in keeping with the sacred stories. I also connect him physically to the earth by providing descriptions of his body that physically show this relationship with the earth (the half-truth connection) and his strong connection to it since he helped to create Turtle Island (Ray & Stevens, 2003).

A part of this complexity of Weesquachak can be seen in his interactions with Butterfly. Saying little, but suggesting through his actions and what appears to Butterfly in the dreams with him, Weesquachak is playing his role as trickster: he purposefully says nothing and leaves Butterfly to question what she sees in her dreams and in her real life. We see this uncommunicative interaction in the following scenes:

Waiting at the end of the path. Someone, a man, who didn't seem to be exactly a person. I couldn't see his face . . . A flutter of large wings made me glance away, and when I looked back on the path the man was gone. (p. 65)

After Butterfly dreams of Weesquachak a few times, he speaks with her:

'It is dead,' he said.

I nodded. It was a baby duckling, yellow and still fluffy. 'How did it die?'

‘It died,’ he said in the same quiet, mellow tone. ‘All things die. All things come to a circle.’ (p. 83)

In this conversation, we see Butterfly’s interest in the dead duckling. The death of the duckling is not important here; rather it is the suggestion that something has died. This dream with Weesquachak metaphorically foretells the deaths of the moose as well as the tragic and sudden death of Saagaate. These deaths signify the medicine wheel teachings and circular nature of birth and death as a natural part of life (Lane, et al, 1985).

After she dreams, the dreams linger with her and at times seem to blend into the real world. The dreams with Weesquachak often signify another event that will happen to Butterfly. Butterfly starts to see glimpses of Weesquachak in her real world. She first sees him outside of her bedroom window, across the street, and recognizes him immediately as the man in her dreams (p. 104). This playfulness of throwing stones at Butterfly’s window is an indication of his traditional nature to play tricks on humans for personal gain. We see this in “The Secret Name” from Ray and Stevens (2003) in which Weesquachak overhears two men talking about a contest held by a Chief where whoever guesses his beautiful daughter’s name gets to be her husband (p. 33). In the next scene, Weesquachak, curious, “decided to find out the secret name of the maiden and take her as his woman” (p. 33). I do not make clear what Weesquachak’s intentions are with Butterfly at any point in the dissertation novel, and that aspect I will leave up to readers to decide. There are other characters, however, that Butterfly becomes curious about.

Other characters that appear to Butterfly, whether or not she realizes who they actually are, are usually explained through her Cocom. For instance, Butterfly questions her Cocom about the Apa’chininiichug. Her Cocom speaks with her about them, who

they are, and what they do. Butterfly's doubt about the things she has been seeing in her real life seems to ease and we can also get the sense that she is getting a sense for the other characters she has been seeing and who they may be (pp. 110-111).

Windigo.

Keeping true to human experiences and human life is something that I feel is a key aspect of sacred stories featuring human beings: they reflect the truth about human living and human relationships. In Ojibwe and Cree sacred story, the Windigo is feared the most (Ray & Stevens, 2003). It is a once-human cannibalistic creature that not only murders, but also transforms the very souls of other humans into dark, malevolent creatures devoid of any goodness. This lack of goodness is an important characteristic in the Windigo especially when we consider that the Medicine Wheel teaches that there must be a balance of oneself (Lane, et al, 1985) and where it is the opposite of the Seven Grandfather Teachings (Benton-Banai, 1988). In the fight with Windigo, we can see how the Windigo demonstrates a lack of respect because there is a lack of honour for Butterfly's life. We also see how in this scene, we also see a lack of love: there is no peace in this fight, and a clear sense of destruction. We see honesty in this scene when Butterfly declares her love for family and friends. We see honesty, truth, and wisdom in Butterfly's declaration of love for her own self and her own life. We see bravery occur when Butterfly faces the Windigo and fights for her life. There is also a lack of humility from the Windigo because he does not live in harmony with Creation (Benton-Banai, 1988; Buswa & Shawana, 1994). Ray and Stevens (2003) portray Windigo through several stories in their book called *Sacred Legends*. In "The Windigo Spirit," the Windigo is described:

The windigo was once a normal human being but has been possessed by a savage cannibalistic spirit . . . When the ugly creature attacks, it shows no mercy. This monster will kill and devour its own family to try and satisfy its lust for human flesh . . . When a windigo has destroyed its own people it will travel in a straight line across the forest until it finds the next group of victims. Usually high winds and blizzards accompany the windigo in its travels. It is said that the scream of a windigo will paralyze a man, preventing him from protecting himself. Sometimes an attack by a windigo can be turned away by a powerful medicine man and this has occurred. (p. 122)

In the dissertation novel, when Butterfly first meets the Windigo, she sees the deceased people in the camp first, and the fire in the centre that was created as a way to attempt to deter the Windigo. As the quotation above also describes, Butterfly seems stunned and "paralyzed" when she meets the Windigo who picks her up and attempts to kill her.

The physical appearance of the Windigo is no less terrifying. The physical appearance of the Windigo is just as, if not more, grotesque and fearsome than its behaviour. In their collection of sacred stories, Ray and Stevens (2003) provide stories of the Windigo. The story describes the Windigo's transformation from human into a creature beginning when "ice forms inside the human body, hair grows profusely from the face, arms and legs and an insatiable craving for human flesh develops" (p. 122). In *The Manitous* by Basil Johnston (1996), he also describes the Windigo (he uses the spelling Weendigo) as:

A giant Manitou [spirit] in the form of a man or a woman, who towered five to eight times above the height of a tall man. But the Weendigo was a giant in height only; in girth and strength, it was not . . . the Weendigo was gaunt to the point of emaciation, its desiccated skin pulled tautly over its bones . . . its complexion the ash gray of death, and its eyes pushed back deep into their sockets . . . the Weendigo gave off a strange and eerie odor of decay and decomposition, of death and corruption. (p. 221)

We see more of this grotesque transformation of human into Windigo from other sources. The transformation from human to Windigo can also be seen in "The Windigo Woman" from Ray and Stevens (2003): "after a time her body began to feel cold. Chills and shivering gripped her in the night. She knew that the Windigo spirit was taking possession of her again" (p. 125). In the dissertation novel, Butterfly is not only being crushed by the Windigo, but she feels that she is dying. Butterfly describes how she is not only dying, but also becoming a Windigo herself. Although I do not write about how the Windigo is ripping the flesh from Butterfly as is described by Ray and Stevens, her death is more of a spiritual death and she feels herself becoming colder as she slowly dies. The near spiritual death that Butterfly experiences in her dream is metaphorical of the spiritual death she is experiencing in her real life through her depression and her self-destructive behaviour of the cutting of her fingers. This spiritual death is more symbolic of the transformation into Windigo than the bloodier death, but no less violent. Ray and Stevens also report that the Windigo "snows no mercy" to its victims (p. 122) and can "paralyze a man, preventing him from protecting himself" (p. 122). In the dream where Butterfly sees the camp and the victims of the Windigo, she hears the Windigo coming,

she hears its wail, and then she struggles against being turned into a Windigo herself.

This scene is important for Butterfly as she decides and realizes that she wants to live, that she in fact does not need to feel guilt over Saagaate's death, and decides that her love for herself and those around her will save her. Ray and Stevens (2003) write, "sometimes an attack by a windigo can be turned away by a powerful medicine man" (p. 122). I do not assume that Butterfly herself is a medicine woman who is a respected healer in a community—although both medicine men and women exist and practice today—but, rather, it is love itself that has the power to save Butterfly:

I kicked again, screaming against it, pushing and punching and yelling. It crushed me harder, its arms like steel around my back. I felt my body become weaker. I knew then that it was feeding on me. It was feeding on my soul.

I thought only of that love again, of that pure and honest feeling, of that intense knowledge that I loved and was loved and that I loved myself.

I was loved. I was loved. I was loved. I thought the phrase over and over again.

I was not alone. (p. 153)

Just as in Sanderson's work, Butterfly chooses to live. She knows that she is loved by many people, including herself, and uses this love to fight against Windigo and live (pp. 150-151). In Sanderson's graphic novel, the Elder tells Kyle of Windigo, "He'll use your confusion. He'll use your sadness. And he'll use your fears against you. And he'll eat your spirit" (p. 23). As the Elder tells his story, we see Kyle's imagination at work and he pictures Weesquachak as a superhero who battles the Windigo (pp. 24-40). In a moment

of weakness, Weesquachak seems like he is going to lose the battle. In his mind, Kyle transports into the battle and Weesquachak tells the Windigo that it is Kyle who can defeat it (pp. 41-42). Weesquachak urges Kyle to believe in himself (p. 43) and Kyle yells repeatedly that he does not want to die (pp. 44-45). In doing so, Kyle defeats the Windigo (p. 45). This sense of self-love and self-preservation and a willingness to live are apparent in both stories.

Further, the development of ice inside the body, as is described in the sacred stories from Ray and Stevens (2003) and Johnston (1996), happens to Butterfly as she feels herself dying, and thusly changing, and she clings to the thoughts she has for those she loves, and for the love she knows she has for herself but has forgotten. This trait can be seen in discussions from Johnston's *The Manitous* (1995) where he writes that "Human beings are just a little too inclined to self-indulgence, at times a shade too intemperate, for even the specter of the Weendigo to frighten them into deference. At root is selfishness, regarded by the Anishinaubae people as the worst human shortcoming" (p. 223). Johnston also states "the Weendigo represented not only the worst that a human can do to another human being and ultimately to himself or herself, but exemplified other despicable traits" (p. 222). When we see this description of the motives for becoming a Windigo, we can draw links between Butterfly's behaviours of depression and cutting and withdrawing from those she loves—all of these actions can be seen as a form of self-indulgence or even selfishness, and is also seen when Butterfly disconnects herself from her friends and interacts less with her family. On this aspect of self-indulgence, Leanne Simpson (2011), writes that Windigo stories "symbolizes the potentially addictive part of the human condition—when certain desires are indulged, this stimulates more indulgence

until all reason and control are lost . . . when one harms the earth, one harms oneself because we are part of that whole" (Simpson, 2011, p. 70). When Butterfly is being killed and her spirit taken over by Windigo, she resists. Her resistance can also be a metaphor for her resistance and rejection of her self-indulgences. As Johnston (1995) writes, "humans must kill the Weendigo to betoken that they must put an end to certain self-serving indulgences or be destroyed" (p. 224). Many thoughts and changes in Butterfly allow her to defeat the Windigo and return home: it is her resistance to the Windigo itself, it is her ultimate realization that she loves herself and her family, and it is her discontinuation of the self-harm that combine and allow her to resist and defeat the Windigo's influence. We can infer in her knowledge that if she were to die, all those that love her would become saddened (p. 153). Although we can see her choice to live also as an act of self-preservation, it is clearer here that she is thinking about her family and loved ones more than she is purely about herself.

Just as she banishes those behaviours of self-destruction and depression during her battle with the Windigo, she banishes the Windigo at the same time; she has driven it from herself. Yet, when Butterfly finds herself outside and in the middle of her snow-covered yard after her encounter with Windigo, she doubts what has happened. This doubt, however, is in keeping with the traditions and views of Windigo from Ojibwe and Cree cultures. Basil Johnston (1995), explains this phenomenon: "Even though a Weendigo is a mythical creature . . . as time went by, more and more learned people declared that such monsters were a product of superstitious minds and imaginations. As a result, the Wendigoes were driven from their place in Anishinaubae traditions and culture and ostracized by disbelief and skepticism" (p. 235). By the end of the dissertation story,

we can see Butterfly gradually coming out of her depression. It is perhaps in part her experiences in her dream world—which at times seems to invade her real world such as when she wakes up with bruises over her body (p. 155)—that help her to realize the strengths and support of her family and friends.

Chakabesh.

Chakabesh is a young man with supernatural qualities appearing in sacred stories across many Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree communities in Northwestern Ontario. A part of sacred stories, but in a category called "The 'Heroic' Episode" as defined by Ellis (1995), the stories of Chakabesh allow for "individual improvisation in developing the theme" (p. xxvii) within the story while ensuring that major events are kept in the same order and with the same details. It is the sequence of events in stories, such as those featuring Chakabesh, that are of the most importance. However, I must note here that while I do provide some examination of these sacred stories, in terms of "finding" appropriate morals or values from the Seven Grandfather Teachings, these findings come from my own personal interpretations of the sacred stories and the reader may find other Teachings in them—as is the way of Ojibwe and Cree sacred story.

In my dissertation novel, I do not retell stories of Chakabesh. Rather, I provide suggestions of events that we have seen in sacred stories of Chakabesh. For instance, we get a sense of Chakabesh as a sacred story character in the dissertation story when he passes a group of football players: "[Chakabesh] passed a group of football players in their gear and headed out, presumably, to the football field. I swear I could hear Chuck yell 'Giants!' at them, as if it were a slanderous word" (p. 149). We also see suggestion of Chakabesh fighting the football players in the school hallway in the dissertation story

(p. 130). In the sacred stories giants killed Chakabesh's parents, and through his adventures he takes each opportunity to outwit or fight them (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 102-105, pp. 106-107).

The sacred stories of Chakabesh begin first with the murder of his parents by giants and cannibalistic creatures, and the sister's protection of the infant Chakabesh. Knowing this facet of Chakabesh's life is important in that this event permeates throughout Chakabesh's stories. The death of Chakabesh's parents affects his actions and behaviours. For instance, he sometimes takes pity on creatures and for the rest of his life he is shown to always get out of dangerous situations; he is a survivor. This also helps to ground him as a tangible person. For instance, the ability to sympathize with the death of Chakabesh's parents helps to connect us to him. In the stories of Chakabesh growing up, it is clear that Chakabesh had superhuman qualities: he never cried, he walked and carried water when those his age were still in tikinagans (baby carriers), and had immense strength and skill in everything that he did especially with his bow (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 102). Chakabesh's short stature, which ranges significantly depending on which version is read/heard, is "compensated by ingenuity" (Ellis, p. xxvii). Yet, despite Chakabesh's superhuman qualities, they are not heavily exaggerated like superhero qualities are; they remain within the boundaries of human limitations. The aspect of human limitations is also echoed within the dissertation novel through the life of the protagonist "Butterfly" who experiences events which are out of her own control—such as when Saagaate dies and Butterfly feels guilty for not being able to prevent it, or when Sacha says racist remarks to her and Butterfly is stunned into silence and confusion—and where she is limited in how she can affect the outcomes: just as we all

are.

In one particular scene which I echo again here for a different purpose, Butterfly overhears Chakabesh yell "Giants" and he is seen fighting with some young men from the football team and we get the sense of his superhuman fighting skills or strength. In this scene, I echo a scene from a sacred story in which Chakabesh fights with Giants (from Ray & Stevens' (2003) "Ja-Ka-Baysh Outwits the Giants Again", p. 106). This scene, in the sacred story, would represent bravery, and I tried to echo that within my novel while also keeping true to Chakabesh's playful and mischievous nature. I also chose football players as representations of Giants because, in a school setting, their generalized ideals of strength echo most closely those of Giants from the sacred story. Chakabesh's lisp was also something I wanted to include as it is a part of Chakabesh himself and who he is (Ellis, 1995; Ray & Stevens, 2003). Because it is not appropriate to retell the stories from Ray and Stevens (2003) and Ellis (1995), I echo situations from the sacred stories in which Chakabesh appears.

While Chakabesh is strong and brave, bravery as a virtue in the Seven Grandfather Teachings is reflected typically through the way in which a foe or enemy is faced: with integrity (Benton-Banai, 1988). Often Chakabesh picks fights, starts fights, and rushes into danger without care for the consequences—he may also do these for a simple fact that in sacred story, Chakabesh never backs down from a challenge. Ray and Stevens are clear to point this out, "But everything the sister cautioned Ja-ka-baysh not to do, the confident Indian did. Ja-ka-baysh tried to prove himself against all challenges that confronted him (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 104). What we can learn from this is that although Chakabesh often acts in this way, it is recognizing how he *should* act that is

important. This same fight is inspired from Chakabesh's fight with the Giants (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 104-105), when he fights an Anishinawbe man (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 102-104), and when he fights Giant Women:

He squirmed. He wiggled to escape. He screamed. He tried to bite, but his captor held him firm. In fact the women who held him squeezed even harder to prevent him from getting away, so he screamed again. (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 168)

Chakabesh's vitality for life is clear in his rambunctiousness in fights. His flirtations in the school hallways are echoes of his arousal by the giant women. We see this lust and flirtation in a passage from Ray and Stevens (2003) who write, "Sitting there he watched the giant women work and he noticed some of them were quite beautiful. Soon he began to feel the manly passion rise in him and he took his sexual organ and shoved it through one of the holes in the moose hide" (p. 104). We see more of this behaviour from Chakabesh in other tellings of his stories. Basil Johnston (1995) writes:

As he watched the naked Amazons (giantesses), he began to breathe hard, almost panting as if he had been running hard. He felt surges of heat followed by waves of chills that produced a rash of goose bumps on his flesh. He sensed an overpowering urge to seize one of the women, and would have done so if he was bigger. (p. 167)

Ellis (1995) also reports on the lust that Chakabesh enacts in the sacred story "Chahkabesh and the Giant Women" (pp. 314-317):

He saw then . . . two giant girls making a noise scraping beaver skins very early in the morning. So then, when he saw them away over, he stealthily

sneaked up on them there. At last, however, he was seen by them as . . . he came stealthily sneaking up on them. But he kept ducking behind the trees. At last when he was getting pretty close, he stood there at a tree, standing behind the tree. But he was watched by . . . [that] giant girl. So then, as he was doing that to them . . . Chahkabesh kept sticking out from behind the tree that little thing of his [,] his penis. So then these giant girls laughed very hard. (p. 315)

In the dissertation novel, Chakabesh is presented as a charming ladies' man: his lisp is an attribute that the girls around him seem to like, and his sauntering through the hallways and hitting on girls demonstrate this:

His swaggered and confident walk.

His long, black hair swaying slightly from side to side.

His short stature.

He wasn't a little person. He was just really short. Like at or under five feet tall.

He came towards me as Zoe approached from the other direction. I watched as he strutted, grinning and nodding at the few girls who walked past him. Oh, he was totally a charmer. He stopped next to us.

'Hey there,' he smiled slyly. 'It'sth nith to see you fine ladieths, huh. You can call me Chuck.'

Zoe laughed, I couldn't help but laugh too—but I wasn't sure if I really felt it inside or if I was just laughing because Zoe was. If it wasn't the sudden and blaring obviousness of his charm, suave, and utter fascination, it

was the lisp that he had that made you like him instantly. Although he wasn't the typical tall, dark and handsome, you could tell he was a ladies' man—even for one who looked so young and short. (p. 107)

It is clear that he purposefully flirts with women. Further, we can also clearly see his vivacity and male-hormone propelled behaviour as demonstrated in the dissertation novel. Although he does not have a huge role in the dissertation novel, his presence, as shown in the examples above, I felt, was necessary to help set tone, to provide humour, and to share my affection for this heroic character.

Chakabesh and his sister are the only characters in the story that do not appear to Butterfly in her dreams. Chakabesh is also only one of two sacred story characters, the other being the Apa'chininiichug, that the human characters in the story see. The decision to include Chakabesh as a character who could appear in both Butterfly's dreams and the real world goes to the idea that in sacred stories Chakabesh was originally from another part of the world. Ray and Stevens (2003) write:

This story begins in another world which was an evil place dominated by giants and strange cannibalistic creatures. In the old days a man and woman lived there with their children. The oldest child was a girl and the younger baby was a boy called Ja-ka-besh. (p. 102)

The story also describes how giant bears came into the family's camp. The older sister hid Chakabesh away from the camp and saw her parents killed when she returned. The sister then hurried and took herself and her brother "away from the land of their birth. Moons had crossed the sky many times before the girl came out from the country of the giants" (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 102). Chakabesh is one of the very few sacred story

characters that have travelled from other worlds and into Turtle Island. That Chakabesh is originally from another world explains his visibility to humans and lack of representation in Butterfly's dream world.

Seven Grandfather Teachings and Chakabesh.

The stories of Chakabesh clearly portray the Seven Grandfather Teachings. It is also clear in the stories of Chakabesh that the sister's deep love for her younger brother Chakabesh allows her to keep her brother from danger. Her dedication to his welfare and safety during his life is what best demonstrates the Seven Grandfather Teaching Love (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 105-106). The teaching of Wisdom is also apparent in these Sacred Stories. To illustrate, the sister's protection of Chakabesh is shown through her sound advice and warnings to Chakabesh about not doing, or staying away from, something that could be dangerous. We see this in stories of *Ja-ka-besh and the Giants* (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 104-105) and *Ja-ka-besh and the Big Fish* (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 105; Stephen, Wesley, & Wesley, 1992, p. 3). Her advice and knowledge about what could happen *should* keep Chakabesh away from danger. But Chakabesh is not one to shy away from danger but runs into it head-on regardless of the consequences, often ignoring her advice and warnings but later realizing the wisdom of them. As Ellis (1995) explains, "his curiosity about the world around him knew no bounds . . . his older sister was forever afraid that her little brother's uncontrollable curiosity would be the end of him; and sometimes it nearly was" (p. xxvii). His actions stemming from his traits of curiosity can also border on bravery and strength. The stories of Chakabesh fighting the giants, while bordering on recklessness, hint at bravery are meant to help demonstrate brave behaviours because of the creatures that killed his parents. The Seven Grandfather

Teachings are about living a good life and living "in harmony with the Creation" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 60). This is the clear distinction between Chakabesh's bravery and the idea of being reckless. In none of the sacred stories does Chakabesh endanger another person's life, and although we may see that he is endangering his own, there is a clear indication of his assuredness of coming out of a situation unscathed.

Chakabesh tends to carry out his deeds and actions in less than virtuous ways. While we see his virtues, we can also learn from his mistakes and character flaws. Yet, when he does not recognize or carry out these Seven Grandfather Teachings, the reader, hopefully, is able to see what he could have done instead to demonstrate those Seven Grandfather Teachings. For instance, when he snares the sun and causes the sky to become dark for a long period of time, he whistles contentedly away once the sun comes back up apparently unfazed by the catastrophe he could have caused and the lack of respect he showed the sun (Ellis, 1995, p. 15; Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp.107-109).

However, despite any character flaws Chakabesh has, he is always truthful to his sister, no matter the trouble he may have caused through his unabashed brazenness toward danger. In sacred stories learning of the flaws of human behaviour is just as important as learning good and brave behaviour, which is also reflected in the Teachings.

Chakabesh demonstrates respect in his treatment of his sister. Although he does not usually follow her advice and sometimes teases her, Chakabesh always listens to her, never cutting her off or interrupting her as she speaks. He returns to her when he is scared or in trouble, knowing that she will protect him as best she can or give him advice. Her role as sister and nurturer and her general treatment of Chakabesh help the reader to see these treatments of respect (from Chakabesh and also from the sister). Benton-Banai

(1988) writes, "to honour all of the Creation is to have respect" (p. 64). Although the sister warns Chakabesh of potential danger, she does not force him to stop. Neither does she chastise him upon his return. In this way she is honouring his choices and she is honouring Chakabesh.

Stories of Chakabesh could be used within Seven Grandfather Teachings Education. The Teachings of love, wisdom, and bravery reflected in the stories of Chakabesh help me to write true to his character (presented in the sacred stories) and to help ground the purposes for bringing in the Seven Grandfather Teachings into my dissertation novel.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are about a way of living. The Medicine Wheel is also about a way of living. These teachings show us how to live in harmony and balance with ourselves, with people around us, and with nature (Lane et al, 1985). The dissertation novel explores how Butterfly struggles with attaining this balance and how she begins that journey after defeat of the Windigo.

Chakabesh's Older Sister.

Chakabesh's older sister appears in the dissertation story after Butterfly wakes up in her front yard in the snow after defeating the Windigo. Her presence is an echo of her role in the sacred stories with Chakabesh. In the dissertation story we see, presumably, the sister approach Butterfly as she lays in the snow. We have three indications that this is Chakabesh's older sister. The first presents itself when she tells Butterfly that she was worried for her (p. 154). In the sacred stories, Chakabesh's older sister spends time worrying about Chakabesh as he is off on his adventures for days or even months (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 105; Stephen, Wesley and Wesley, 1992, p. 7). The second suggestion

that this is Chakabesh's older sister comes from her declaration of her name as being "Sister." Butterfly assumes she has misheard the name, but she has not (p. 154). The third instance where we can say that this is Chakabesh's sister connects to the stories with Chakabesh and the idea that because she is from a different part of the world she can travel and be seen in Butterfly's reality. The appearance of Chakabesh's older sister allows opportunity in the dissertation story for Butterfly to experience some additional help and support from those who care for her.

Apa'chininiichug.

Of the characters that Butterfly interacts with and sees throughout her story, the Apa'chininiichug are one of the few that she sees more often. The Apa'chininiichug are tiny human-like creatures that, depending on who is telling the story, range from under a foot in height to around the height of a child (Johnston, 1995, p. 152). In my family, the Apa'chininiichug are mischievous creatures that do not often let humans see them; if you are to see one, it should be taken as a sign of respect because they have allowed you to see them. The fact that the Apa'chininiichug are meant to be seen by humans, or that they allow themselves to be seen (Johnston, 1995), is the primary reason why Cocom is able to see the tiny people and provides a reason why she knows about them. Although these creatures appear in a dream Butterfly has (p. 110), it is more of a nightmare of her fears and worries rather than a dream in which she learns something or where a teaching can be found.

Sacred stories about the Apa'chininiichug are not as widely told as those about other characters. Growing up, I heard of these Apa'chininiichug once in a while from my mother. She created a painting of them when I was in high school that depicted one-

hundred of these beings in various states of visibility and concealment and activity and I was always fascinated by it. It was this same fascination that urged me to include them within my dissertation novel, not only because of my personal interest, but also because of their mischievous nature. Basil Johnston (1994), who calls them Paweesuk in *Ojibwe Heritage*, describes them as creatures "who emerged from their sanctuaries on moonlit nights to dance in the shadows . . . small and frail, easily frightened and injured. They were weak. . . they were humble . . . [able to conceal themselves] in the tree tops and limbs" (p. 168). In Johnston's *The Manitous* (1995), he identifies another being called Maemaegawaehnssiwuk who live inside rock cliffs and are "beloved for their special care and regard for children. Adults who claim to have seen them described the little people as shaggy, hairy, unkempt, miniature grown-ups" (pp. 151-152). When these small beings first appear to Butterfly, she is frightened of them. Then, as she sees them more and usually hiding or peeking around bushes in her yard, her fear lessens. One moonlit night, Butterfly also discusses them with her Cocom who indicates that to see them is a privilege:

‘They’re the Apa’chininiichug,’ she finally said. Then, seeing the confused expression on my face, she added. ‘They are the little people. They are allowing you to see them. It is a privilege to see them,’ she turned her head to the window. I didn’t know if she could see them. I didn’t ask. I didn’t ask because I was afraid that she couldn’t see them at all. (p. 110)

Butterfly’s interest in these little people, these Apa’chininiichug, is apparent when she also dreams of them that night:

They were peering from the trees. So many of them. The Apa'chininiichug. It seemed like they were curious, but not wanting me to really see them clearly. They lived in the trees, homes hidden in them and on the ground too. Only out of the corner of my eye, in my peripheral vision did I see them. Then, suddenly, they surrounded me. They were staring up at me, reaching out— (p. 110)

From Johnston (1995), we learn that these little people could "safeguard human beings" (p. 151). It is with this thought in mind that I also included these little people in my dissertation novel. As Butterfly goes along her journey, it can be inferred that she may be protected in some ways, that she may be "safeguarded" by the Apa'chininiichug.

The Two Sisters.

The final set of characters that appear in my dissertation is the two sisters. I have only heard of the story of the two sisters a couple of times. The first time from Ray and Stevens (2003) "The Younger Sister" (p. 67), and the other time from my mother. Although I do not feel that their story is as widely known as those of characters like Weesquachak or Chakabesh, I have always liked this story and felt myself drawn to it primarily because of my interest in astronomy and because this story is one of the few I have read that talks about stars in the sky. "The Younger Sister" tells the story of a younger sister who was constantly trying to out-do her older sister. When the younger sister claimed a small bright star to "make love to" (p. 67), the older sister takes the only other star in the sky, a large dull one. In the morning, the younger sister awakes to find an old man embracing her, while the older sister woke up in the "arms of the handsomest young man she had ever seen. The man was embracing the older sister and kissing her"

(p. 67). Ray and Stevens (2003) provide some reasoning behind this story of transformation of stars into men stating, "never again did the younger sister try to do better than her older sister" (p. 67). In the dissertation story, we see the relationship between the Two Sisters echoed in the relationship between Butterfly and Marguerite "Ettie". Butterfly and Ettie's relationship is often strained and Butterfly constantly seeks her sister's trust or attention (pp. 80-81, 101-102). Butterfly also admires Ettie, her nails and her sense of style (p. 60). But what Butterfly seeks most is Ettie's trust; she gains her trust later in the dissertation story when she and Ettie talk about Val and the journal writing (pp. 159-160, 172). At the end of the dissertation story, we see that Butterfly and Ettie become closer and we can see their relationship become stronger.

Another significant event for Butterfly, especially when we think of her conflicts regarding her sense of self and culture, is the appearance of the two sisters outside of the movie theatre one night as she and her friends are rushing to go inside. This scene of the two sisters is the only larger scene within the dissertation novel that retells a sacred story: the two sisters are joking about which celestial star they want as a husband, the younger sister wants the small bright star, the older sister will take the large red one (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 67). Although I was torn about including this piece of the story in the dissertation novel, the event itself is important to the development of Butterfly: she sees, for the first time, sacred story characters outside of her dreams. It is also the first time Butterfly wonders whether or not what she sees is real. This event, and the sacred story that goes along with it, also symbolizes Butterfly's relationship with her older sister: something tenuous and even strained, but always a relationship that Butterfly craves to have.

Rolling Head.

A darker side to Butterfly's viewing of sacred story characters is the appearance of the Rolling Head. In sacred story, Rolling Head is viewed as part cautionary tale similar to Windigo stories, and part horror story. In many of the sacred stories featuring Rolling Head, she begins as a beautiful, dutiful wife with two sons, then is either seduced or becomes possessed and has a carnal relationship with snakes (which are sometimes referred to as vines depending upon the teller). Her husband, who later kills her "lover" and puts the remains into a meal and has her eat some, sees this sexual act with "snakes". In despair, she runs into the woods to see her lover's remains. To save the two sons, the father gives the eldest son magical objects to keep away their possessed mother. When the wife returns, she becomes enraged and attacks her husband. In the fight, her head is chopped off, but it continues to live and she kills him and devours him. Following this, she relentlessly pursues her children, overcoming each of four magical obstacles her eldest son puts in her way. She drowns trying to cross the fifth and final obstacle, a river, as her two sons throw rocks at the head (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 48-52).

In the dissertation novel, Butterfly sees a woman outside her window whose head is chopped off by an axe wielded by a man, and whose head then rolls and chases after two young boys. When Butterfly screams, Cocom comes into the room. We can get the sense that Cocom is not perturbed by the events that Butterfly describes because we can infer that Cocom knows the story of Rolling Head. Cocom tells her "sometimes we see things we shouldn't" and it is a reflection to Butterfly of the dreams she has been having, and of the things she has been seeing in her real world. Although what she saw disturbs Butterfly, the event is presented as separate from the other sacred story characters she

sees. It can be suggested that this inferred cautionary tale is a caution to Butterfly for her not to indulge in things she should not or not to feel jealous of others. On the other hand, this scene can also be a reflection on her own guilt and feelings around the death of her cousin Saagaate in that both scenes of death can shock those who witness them.

Iyas and Fox.

There are a few other characters within the dissertation novel that Butterfly sees in her dreams. In one scene she sees a man and a red fox: these two figures are Iyas and his grandmother Fox (Ray & Stevens, 2003, pp. 114-116; Sugarhead & O'Meara, 1996, pp. 70-91). Iyas and grandmother Fox are symbols of Butterfly's search for answers. Her dream of Iyas and the Fox (p. 97) and her subsequent talks with her Cocom are both reflections of her own journey and the struggles she must overcome, and also how she too seeks her grandmother's advice. Ray and Stevens (2003) present the story of Iyas and some of his struggles:

Visions during fasting did not reveal any escape for Iyas from the island prison of the giant seagulls. It would be impossible to survive there because not even lichen could grow on the barren rainswept cliffs. Iyas began to cry; he knew that death was near him and that he would never see his beloved mother again. (p. 114)

We see this same sense of despair in Butterfly when she feels guilty about Saagaate and seeks comfort in constantly helping around the house:

A part of me wondered too if I was doing this because I was feeling guilty. Guilty because I should have told Saagaate not to go, or to be careful . . . some warning. But what if it would've happened anyway? I

didn't know. Maybe I was just keeping myself busy so I didn't have to think about it so much.

It was hard to realize that she wasn't going to speak anymore. Wasn't going to laugh. Wasn't going to give hugs. Wasn't going to run. Wasn't going to draw. Wasn't going to kiss or get married or have kids of her own. There wasn't anything she was going to do . . . not here with us anyway. (p. 96)

We also see Butterfly's guilt manifest itself into her dreams:

She was falling through clouds. The ground miles below her. Reaching for me. Anger in her eyes. She mouthed, "Why didn't you tell me?" . . .

I was crawling through a tunnel. The ground beneath me cool, wet, musky, musty. The sequential lights on the ceiling, silver and faint.

Something brushed across my hand. I yanked it to my chest. (p. 97)

This sense of crawling through a dark tunnel may also be a metaphor for Saagaate in her coffin buried in the earth. Butterfly has been thinking of Saagaate and had paid much attention to Saagaate's body during the funeral. After this, we see Butterfly struggling with her sense of self, her love for herself, and how she tries to overcome this challenge in her life. Just as Iyas is on a quest in the sacred stories, so is Butterfly. When she has lost control of herself and the "quest" she undergoes to regain her love for herself and understanding of those around her.

Beautiful Woman.

In a dream sequence, Butterfly sees a beautiful woman (p. 98). This beautiful woman is akin to a character seen in Ray and Stevens' (2003) "The Proud Maiden" (pp. 79-80). The beautiful woman is also a symbol of not passing up a "good thing" when it happens in the hopes of gaining one later in life; a feature of the novel is that Butterfly takes a risk in opening up her emotions to Tristan as their relationship develops throughout the novel. We can also infer that the beautiful woman may be a representation of what Butterfly hopes she may transform into at some point in her life. After Butterfly defeats the Windigo and develops self-love and a strong love for others, we can say that Butterfly has then become that beautiful woman, that realization of something she wanted to become.

Characters and Dreaming

Through her dreams, Butterfly is introduced to the world of sacred story. The *apowawin*, as Johnston (1994) writes, come only "during sleep. Because it occurs during sleep often rousing the dreamer to consciousness and because it makes the dreamer aware of himself, the term means 'awakening' or self-revelation. Self-revelation or awakening . . . was regarded as personal [and] not to be disclosed to others" (p. 127). From this, we can understand Butterfly's reluctance to fully share her dreams with anyone, not even her Cocom with whom she discusses some characters. We also get a sense from Johnston that there is a fine line between the dream world and the waking world. In the dissertation story, we see this haziness when Butterfly wakes up in her yard after the fight with the Windigo and especially when she begins to see glimpses of sacred story characters in her waking reality. Although Chakabesh appears in her school, seemingly as a student, his presence is justified by the fact that he is already not of this world, but born in another

and brought here by his sister. Because other students can see Chakabesh, Butterfly's rationality is not questioned in regards to him. When these realities become blurred, "the laws of both of these dimensions of reality" (Lane et al., 1985, p. 27) become imbalanced and Butterfly quite literally feels these interactions when she receives bruises from the Windigo. In her dream, Butterfly is crushed in the embrace of the Windigo:

It came for me. It came from my side. It flew at me. A gaping hole for its mouth. The teeth were serrated, sharp, fanged. The red eyes were large and bright. It reached for me with clawed hands. It felt colder than the air around me. It enveloped me, crushing me with its arms. I couldn't scream. I couldn't say a word. The air escaped from my lungs in a ragged breath.
(p. 152)

When she wakes, Butterfly is both surprised and disturbed by the realization that she had developed bruises resulting from her dream:

Deep throbs of pain shot up from my back and shoulders. I gasped, my knees going weak for a moment and I grabbed onto my dresser to hold myself up. After a few deep breaths, I took off my shirt, sat at my desk chair, and turned my back to the mirror. Deep, purple and black bruises lined my back like stripes. I gaped in horror at my back. I reached around, over my shoulder, and pressed on some of the bruise. It was tender and sore. It spread deep to the bone. (p. 155)

She shares this concern of her dreams blending into reality and causes physical harm, when she discusses it shortly after with Tristan during the New Year's party at her house (pp. 162-163). I leave the novel with the implication that any further interaction with the

dream world and sacred story characters can be possible for Butterfly—there are no limits.

Dreams play an important role in the dissertation story, as they would if they were a character. Butterfly's dreams allow her to question her reality and also to provide understandings of the world around her. Dreams can provide opportunity to see the future through omens. For instance, in one early scene, Butterfly dreams of a raven and how she is dressed all in black in a dress made of raven feathers (p. 73). According to Ray and Stevens (2003), there is a superstition that when the bird of death is seen, it means that "a person close to your heart may die" (p. 133). This evil raven as the bird of death, known in Cree as Ashi-ga-ga-gih, is a metaphor or prophecy of the death of Saagaate (Ray & Stevens, 2003, p. 133). We can see that dreams allow the opportunity for deeper understanding of meaning to things we experience.

Another example of dreams as moments for meaning or symbolism occurs when Butterfly sees the metamorphosis of the butterflies as a reflection of her own change and her own journey (pp. 138-140). In her dreams, Butterfly is able to focus completely on what is around her. Lane et al. (2004) write that, as children, when we "examined any interesting new aspect of the world, we were completely absorbed by what we were doing. We were able to submerge our total awareness into that [object or event]" (p. 45). Dreams allow for understandings to take place beyond the physical plane and which allow Butterfly to grow and change in both spiritual and mental ways.

Ethics and Behavioural Codes of Conduct

Throughout the dissertation novel, I draw on Dr. Clare Brant's (1990) article "Native Ethics and Rules of Behaviour" as a way to create informed motives and reasons

for characters' interactions and actions. I provide below examples of how each of these are used in the dissertation novel. However, the examples given do not include all instances where these ethics and codes appear throughout the dissertation novel.

As indicated in Part 1 of this dissertation, Dr. Clare Brant's ethics include:

- 1) Non-interference: inhibits argument and advice-giving; non-intrusive modeling; voluntary cooperation
- 2) Anger: not be shown (can interfere in daily duties and peace within community)
- 3) Time: flexible concept of time; the "right" time to do things
- 4) Sharing: group survival: take what you need, share freely
- 5) Excellence: excellence expected, gratitude shown for exceptional accomplishments
- 6) Protocol: protocol in ceremony, manners; not articulated (non-interference)
- 7) Teaching and Learning: instruction based on modelling; practice and observation; observation until time is "right"
- 8) Conservation-withdrawal: a reaction through stress
- 9) Democracy: equality; consensus; personal privacy; autonomy

Non-Interference

In Anishinawbe culture, there is an ethical rule not to interfere in the lives of others (Brant, 1990). Throughout the dissertation novel, Butterfly experiences instances of non-interference. In many scenes, we see that Butterfly is seeking advice from her Cocom. So, when Butterfly asks for help, she is given it because it was requested, but her Cocom does not tell Butterfly what she *should* or *should not* do. Along the same lines of non-interference, Butterfly's mother Ethlynn and her sister Marguerite "Ettie" give her journals that she can use to help vent out her feelings and frustrations (pp. 115-116, 122, 128). Although she is given the journal, it is still up to Butterfly if and how she chooses to use it: out of the many ways she could have used the journal, she chooses to write diary entries as well as the occasional poem by the end of the story. We also see this when Butterfly overhears her sister talking with their mother about a failed relationship (pp. 142-143); Butterfly not only does not interfere with that discussion, she does not

further interfere by telling her friends about it. There was a conscious decision not to interfere in her sister's experience until her sister brings the situation up with Butterfly later in the novel. We are all given the power of will, and it is what we do with it that matters most (Lane, et al. 1985).

Anger

Anger in an Anishinawbe cultural context is generally thought of as something not to be shown (Brant, 1990). However, it is generally thought that with the repression of anger, there should be outlets to express these feelings in healthy ways (i.e. through physical activity, drawing, or writing). On this concept of ways to express anger, Kristina Fagan (2009), in her article on storytelling and humour as ways to deal with trauma in traditional ways, writes: "There exists simultaneously a need to tell and a sense that one should not tell. Storytelling and humour offer responses to this dilemma, and can act as alternatives to witnessing. They offer Aboriginal people indirect forms of communication, giving them means to show their pain, anger, and criticism in a non-confrontational way" (p. 210). We see this with Butterfly, in her actions with the cutting and how she takes out her emotions in a self-destructive way (pp. 113-114, 121-122). Because of the ethic of not showing anger, Butterfly does not vent her anger on those around her. However, she displays it instead in a negative way instead of a productive or healthy alternative.

We also see this sense of anger when Sacha verbally abuses Butterfly with racial comments and Butterfly is unsure of how to deal with it (pp. 70-71). We later learn that Sacha is being abused at home and deals with an alcoholic parent. In this case too we see how the venting of anger on other people cause create additional stresses and emotional

pain. Butterfly turns to her friends, who also become angry at Sacha's behaviour and come to Butterfly's defense (pp. 71-72). Yet, even in this, we see how returning anger with anger does not help the situation and Butterfly ends up actively avoiding Sacha. We also see anger expressed quite strongly when Butterfly refuses Sacha's apology:

'Well too bad. I don't accept it. You shouldn't have been so nasty. There wasn't a need for it. There was no good reason for what you said to me in the first place! I don't know if you're racist or what, but you don't speak to people like that, ever, and especially when they haven't done anything to you to deserve anything like you did to me!' I was yelling, rushing through my words, furious, my throat tightened and was becoming sore. I cried when I was furious and angry. I couldn't help it. But now, I tried not to cry. I was so furious.

'You're ruining my life, you fucking squaw!' Sacha bellowed, the tears flowing down her cheeks. She pushed past me, raced down the hallway. (p. 130)

In the above, we see how Butterfly's anger towards Sacha exacerbates the situation and Sacha becomes even angrier at Butterfly. At this point the situation has climaxed and is not resolved until months later when Sacha appears emotionally exhausted about the situation and Butterfly has found the courage to tell Sacha her thoughts.

A third instance of anger can be seen when Principal Bianci yells at Chakabesh "Chuck" and the football players in the hallway when he sees them fighting:

Just as [Chuck and the football player] began to throw fists, the principal came tearing down the halls with a few male teachers in his wake.

‘WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON OVER HERE!?’ Mr. Bianci’s voice boomed over the throng, his voice no longer the controlled calm, but a raging gale. The football player who was fighting Chuck gaped and took a step back. Chuck stood firmly, huffing from the exertion. ‘You two. In my office. NOW!’ And off everyone went, the jock and his cohort, Chuck, and the principal with his wake of teachers. (p. 129)

Although the Principal in this scene has effectively ended the fight, the atmosphere during this scene is still tense. When we see anger expressed, we also see how it negatively affects those around us (Brant, 1990). What we may learn from these instances of anger is that there may be other ways not only to express those feelings, as Butterfly does in her journal, but also to treat others.

Time

The passing of time, the waiting for time to pass, the wishing for time to pass more quickly, the remembering of times already gone by, and the right time to do things. Time appears in many ways throughout the novel. A clear instance is the presence of a timeline that helps to guide the reader through the passing of time. We also see time when Butterfly periodically reminisces about the passing of her cousin Saagaate, her life, her death, and her memories of her (pp. 96, 99, 106, 131, 156-157, 159, 163). In addition, Butterfly finds the right time to complete the loom bracelet that Saagaate had begun for her before her death (p. 169). After Butterfly’s Father suggests that she accept Sacha’s apology (pp. 131-132), we see how, later on, when Butterfly finds the right time to confront Sacha, to hear her out, and share her thoughts on events (p. 170). We see during the dissertation novel that Butterfly and other characters have been able to walk between

the worlds of finding the right time to do something and following schedules. Butterfly, while finding the right time to do things in her life, also has to follow schedules from the broader society: school schedule, schedule of class due dates for assignments, calendared holidays like Christmas, and even her dates with friends and boys from school. Butterfly lives in a space and time where she participates in both traditional ways of life and contemporary ways of life. Finding the balance between the two is shown when her family goes hunting: there is a scheduled time to hunt and we see that there is a right time to kill the moose.

Sharing

In many ways we can see instances of sharing. At the picnic in the beginning, the group shares food, laughter and games, and take turns talking. At the dinner table in Butterfly's home, the sharing of food and talk also occurs. With her friends, they share together: talk, laughter, ideas, friendship.

The ethic of non-competitiveness, which is connected to sharing, can be seen in Butterfly's partnering with Tristan to work on the song for her music class. Although she is excited and smiles, she does not brag about her mark to others and she keeps her pride to herself. She does this to avoid hurting others' feelings about her own accomplishment, especially if they did not do well (Brant, 1990). However, a part of Butterfly's imbalance of self becomes visible when she hogs the remote and brags that she has completed her homework before her siblings. Her Cocom signals her disapproval of this act by making a couple of *tch* sounds with her tongue—an act that can be done to signal incorrect behaviour without telling another to correct it. We also see this when Cocom changes the channel on the TV when Butterfly and her siblings are fighting over the remote (p. 116).

Excellence

Excellence can appear in many ways. As an example of improving herself outside of school, we can see Butterfly's interest in reading as an extension of that improvement. We also see this need for excellence in the care, preparation, and time that Butterfly and Tristan take for their final music assignment. Tristan and Butterfly spend much time humming out tunes, filling in music sheets, discussing the sound of the song, and beginning to input their music into a program onto an iPad (p. 161). We can see in this scene a deep interest not only in music, but also in ensuring that they do as best they can for their music activity. We also see excellence in Tristan when he writes the song for Butterfly and performs it during the Music concert (pp. 137-138). We also find out that Tristan had even asked for help from his English teacher concerning the Tanka style of the poem (p. 138).

Protocol

Protocols vary depending on the event and situation. But there are some that are to be expected. For instance, Butterfly indicates early on that her grandparents would begin eating first. This behaviour demonstrates respect for her grandparents. We can see a second example of protocols being adhered to during Saagaate's funeral. The family lays cedar branches on top of Saagaate's coffin. Cedar is a one of the four sacred medicines along with tobacco, sweet grass and sage, that are used in ceremony. Buswa and Shawana (1994) explain that cedar, as a sacred medicine, "is used for prayer . . . [for] ceremonies [and] is hung . . . for protection and good health" (p. 46). This laying down of the cedar branches is done as a way to purify Saagaate's soul. Another instance of protocol appears when Butterfly sees Cocom and Ish in the backyard. When Ish breaks a

branch off of a tree, Cocom leads Ish through a discussion and hands-on participation on showing respect to the tree. We also see protocols demonstrated in the hunting episode in their traditional territory. Grandpa Benny demonstrates giving thanks through gifting tobacco. We also see how much importance is placed upon the handling of the moose's meat:

Grandpa Benny [. . .] said a prayer of thanks to the moose and offered tobacco as well. He cut off the moose's bell and hung it on a branch where the moose had fallen, as was always and forever done by our family [. . .] The women of the family set to skinning the moose. We would use the entire animal. Cocom would turn the hide into traditional leather, mashing the moose's brains into hot water, and then soaked the scraped and cleaned animal skin in the mixture so that it would soften up. It would be stretched and smoked multiple times until it was ready to be made into moccasins and mitts or even a jacket that she would later add beaded designs to [. . .] Grandpa and Dad tied some cord between trees and we hung up the meat so that it would be kept clean. Mom and Auntie covered the meat again with cheesecloth [. . .] Cocom and Mom began to cook the heart, some meat and kidneys over the campfire [. . .] As we began to eat, Grandpa took a little bit from each organ, meat, and some of the bannock and wild rice, and put it on a little paper plate. This he put into the fire. Dad had the first bite of the meal as the hunter who killed the moose. We took turns and told what we remembered most from the hunt as we shared the rest of the meat. (p. 89)

We can see a lot of protocols and family traditions and roles in this post-hunting scene. We also see how many of the adults already know their roles and we can assume that they have done this several times before. The handling of the moose is taken with great care and respect. Using the entirety (or as much as possible) of an animal hunted for food is a primary part of the protocol of hunting. In using all parts of the animal—the brains, the bones, the organs, and the hide—we are showing respect for its life. The offering of a small plate of food shows thanks for the food that is being eaten and the act honours the animals and plants as well. Keeping the meat clean and free from bugs is of course important for health reasons. We also see how much of it is an expected and a normal part of the family hunting. Along with the protocols, each family member is also assigned a role. Traditionally, each person must contribute to the community and its survival.

Teaching and Learning

The protocol and ethic of teaching and learning through modeling is reflected in the ways in which Butterfly learns from her Cocom and her parents. She often asks for their help or asks questions, rather than being told first. There are a few scenes in the dissertation novel where Butterfly instigates discussion with her Cocom about sacred story characters and the strange things she has been dreaming and seeing through her bedroom window. These conversations usually take place in the family living room or Butterfly's bedroom where Butterfly asks Cocom questions about what she has been seeing (pp. 110, 116, 134-135, 171). Cocom imparts some of her thoughts and knowledge about what Butterfly asks or when it is clear that Butterfly seeks her thoughts. Cocom's advice is given to Butterfly in a way that Butterfly can choose to listen to it and choose to act on it however she wishes—we can also see a connection here to non-interference

through Cocom's round-a-bout way of imparting her knowledge. We see this in the discussion about the Apa'chininiichug:

"They're the Apa'chininiichug," she finally said. Then, seeing the confused expression on my face, she added. "They are the little people. They are allowing you to see them. It is a privilege to see them," she turned her head to the window. I didn't know if she could see them. I didn't ask. I didn't ask because I was afraid that she couldn't see them at all.

"But, why?" I asked, but it sounded more like I had blurted it out like a statement rather than a question. (p. 110)

Without telling Butterfly what to do about the little people she has been seeing, Cocom tries to ease Butterfly's worries about them, indicating that they wanted her to see them and that it was a privilege. When Butterfly sees one of the Apa'chininiichug in her room, she remembers her Cocom's words and puts her fear aside:

Despite my fear, I knew and felt that I shouldn't be afraid of the small creature sneaking through my room. I knew it was an Apa'chininiich. I remembered Cocom then. I remembered her telling me that they were not creatures of malice or fear. That these creatures were simply being mischievous. That to see one was a privilege.

I turned my head to the direction of my bedside table.

"Hello," I whispered.

Nothing happened.

"Booshoo," I whispered again.

I saw its head peer from around the table. Its brown leather clothing was crisp and clean. It raised its hand toward me. It pointed out the window.

I turned to look at the window. The moon was the only light outside. I thought it strange at the time.

I turned back to my bedside table. The Apa'chininiich was gone.

(pp. 149-150)

As mentioned in an earlier section, the Apa'chininiichug were helpful to human beings. We can infer here then that the Apa'chininiich (singular to Apa'chininiichug) who visited Butterfly in her room, did so for a reason.

Drumming is another cultural tradition that Butterfly engages in. The drumming in Butterfly's school is done outside of a traditional setting. Through my first-hand knowledge of making a traditional hand-drum and seeing hand drums being used in schools, I know that school hand drums can be made as community drums that would then belong to a whole group of people and not an individual person. These community drums would undergo protocols during their creation and would also receive a birthing or awakening ceremony when they are ready to be played. Butterfly indicates that through school she will be creating her own with help from an Elder. She uses a borrowed hand drum as a part of an assignment for her music class for her and Tristan's final music assignment. Although the hand drum she uses is not one she has birthed herself (her Aunt made the drum), it can be seen as a family drum that could be borrowed by members of the family. On women drumming, Goudreau et al (2008) explain, "Ojibwe women traditionally used medicine drums, in particular the water drum [known as the Mide drum

(Angel, 2002, p. 67)] . . . [which was used by] medicine women who were part of the Midewewin Society [and] used the water drum for healing" (pp. 73-74). Butterfly's use of hand drumming is outside of a traditional setting like what we would see in a drumming circle, and it is also not a water drum. However Butterfly shows respect for the hand drum and demonstrates and reflects the teachings of how to care for it (p. 169). One instance of this occurs when, during their music performance at the end of the first school semester, Butterfly indicates that she was careful to place the drum down on its frame and not on the rawhide part. At the end of the dissertation novel, Butterfly has begun to overcome her depression, and has also a growing sense of self-esteem and pride in her culture. Drumming in front of her entire class is a way in which Butterfly asserts herself and her culture.

Conservation-Withdrawal

Butterfly's use of the journal to vent her emotions, her sadness and anger, also reflects the ethic of not showing anger because it can be dangerous to oneself and others (Brant, 1990). When Butterfly retreats into herself after the events with Sacha and the death of Saagaate, she is demonstrating conservation-withdrawal behaviour as described by Brant (1990). The time that Butterfly takes to use the journal that her mother gave her to let out her ideas and feelings reflects doing things when the time is right to do them (Brant, 1990). The idea of privacy through democracy (Brant, 1990) is evident in the silent promise between herself and her mother that the journal would be kept private and that her mother would not read it. We find out later that Butterfly's older sister Marguerite has also kept a journal. The time that Butterfly takes between being verbally

assaulted by the bully Sacha, and when she finally listens to her father and decides to speak with Sacha, reflects Butterfly's need to do it when the time felt right for her.

Another way that we can see how Butterfly's withdrawal into self creates any imbalance is that she starts to make shallow cuts on her fingers (p. 114, 121). As a way to try and outwardly reflect her forming depression, she cuts her fingers in an attempt to feel something other than the dark sadness that is consuming her. The act of this self-destruction and self-mutilation is frowned upon in many traditional Ojibwe ethics, but finding ways to cope with depression is a challenge, and Butterfly copes with it and deals with it through her use of journal writing, her growing love for Tristan, and from the love and support of her family and friends.

Conservation or withdrawal into the self is an act of self-preservation when events in life become too stressful, tense, or when one does not have the skills to cope with a situation. The need to conserve her spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health is at odds with Butterfly's inability to cope in a healthy way with the death of Saagaate and Butterfly's guilt over her death. As we read the story, we can see how Butterfly works to balance herself: she confronts Sacha and deals with those emotions, she comes to accept Saagaate's death as something she could not control, and learns to deal with her emotions in healthier ways (through music, through relationships with friends and family, and through journal writing).

Democracy

Democracy means many things in Anishinawbe culture: equality, consensus, personal privacy, and autonomy. We see equality in Butterfly's immediate family when each individual's voice is always heard (i.e. during meals at the table, or conversations

amongst the family). When Butterfly's family goes hunting, there is a sense of consensus about the trip. Although Ettie does not attend, she still assists in packing the vehicle for the trip. We can see many instances of personal privacy throughout the dissertation novel: there is an understanding that the journal from her mother would be Butterfly's private space, that the mother would never read it. We can see a contrast in privacy when Butterfly overhears and stays to listen to Ettie's and their Mom's conversation about her relationship. We also get a sense of Butterfly's guilt about this situation when she debates about whether or not to tell Ettie's secret to her friends. Another event where we see personal privacy happens when Butterfly's mother gives her the journal. We can see daily autonomy, especially with Ish and Wolf who often play in the security of the backyard, especially when they get a treehouse, and are often undisturbed by parents but are kept an eye on for safety. We also see autonomy occur when Auntie Cynthia makes the decision to move into a new house nearby.

Discussion of the Dissertation Novel

Limitations of the Novel

Along with my research question, there were many other questions I had to consider and keep in mind while I was writing this dissertation. Not only did I think deeply about the content of my story, but I thought about how I was writing it as well: Are the characters engaging? Do all of the elements I wish to include from my research topic blend flawlessly into the story? Will others learn something from this work? Considering the topics I discuss with the story, I feel it is imperative that I make this work well written, and indeed something that can stand on its own. Part of concerning myself with writing well, is looking back at my writing as I write with a critical eye. As

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains, "if we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous . . . Writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us" (p. 36). Tuhiwai Smith's last statement in the previous quotation is valid. While much of what I include in the story is based on personal experiences, the writing of these personal experiences can give rise to me being possibly misunderstood, criticized, and even seen as "other" or negatively different from both Anishinawbe and non-Anishinawbe people.

The scene of Sacha's racial slur directed at Butterfly came from a personal experience when a peer had said to me, "You're not Native because you don't live in the bush." No amount of debate could convince him otherwise and I eventually gave up, reasoning that there was no point trying to convince someone who had already decided not to listen and had shut their ears and heart. I was determined not to allow him to categorize me as "other" than Anishinawbe. Through that experience, I knew early on in writing my dissertation story that there could be potential negativities of the experiences (whether real or fictional) that I share. I also decided not be so concerned about perceptions coming from people who do not know me. I also decided that I would use all of my experiences as strengths and qualities of perseverance and determination. These decisions have also been conveyed in metaphorical or symbolic ways with Butterfly: she overcame her experiences and became a stronger person.

With the use of translated sacred stories, I risk losing meaning and nuances that are only truly understood and reflected in the language in which they are originally spoken. It is well known that many Indigenous peoples no longer speak their cultural language (Lacourt, St. Clair, Kokotailo, Wilson & Chewning, 2005). In Canada, many

Indigenous peoples speak only English or French. The fact that I present my story in English may also be another concern since I do refer to characters and teachings from sacred stories. As my way of paying respect to the traditional oral storytelling, I present the dream scenes with Weesquachak the Trickster in English, but include some words and phrases spoken by Weesquachak in Ojibwe. I also incorporate the language into the chapter titles of the story. In writing a story based on structure of sacred story, of presenting some of the sacred story characters in a contemporary story-text context, I am trying to honour the oral tradition. Although my story is not spoken, I hope that a textual format may suffice. After all, we see sacred story as text (Ellis, 1995; Odjig, 2009; Ray & Stevens, 2003).

A limitation of the work is that while I would ultimately like the dissertation story to be used in schools, there is no guarantee that it will; however, I shall be optimistic. After the dissertation is completed a study could be done within a school board in seeing how other Young Adult Native Literature may function in the curriculum and to determine the viability of my dissertation story as a classroom resource. I may also consider creating a teacher's guide or reader's guide to my dissertation story should an opportunity arise later on.

On the subject of contemporary stories, I will be clear here and note that although I reference vampire and zombie novels within the dissertation story, it is not so much about echoing any type of morals that may be included within those stories, as it is about reflecting popular genres in contemporary teen fiction and creating a believable setting and a believable character. I also have an interest in vampire and zombie fiction, which is also a reason for its inclusion.

Related to Education

Sacred stories teach not only about the cultural traditions, ceremonies, practices, and beliefs, but also about codes of conduct and behaviours. Within my dissertation, I take this topic quite seriously and I have taken much care to bring out the elements of the codes of conduct and behaviour specific to the Anishinawbe culture. Sacred stories teach these sometimes indirectly, sometimes by illustrating improper behaviours. Personal stories, as Ellis (1995) has pointed out, are also a way to teach about behaviour through personal experiences. Fagan (2009) writes, "writers use storytelling to explore connections between the traumatic past and troubles in the present and to self-reflexively examine the potential and limits of such indirect and humorous communication" (pp. 204-205). Two primary lessons that I hope readers may see, through Butterfly's experiences, are the lessons of self-love and perseverance. I hope that my novel may teach that no situation is ever dire or ever without solution or will never end; there is hope. I also hope that my novel may express that everyone's own unique experiences make up who they are as people, and whether good or bad, they should all be embraced. Of course, you are entitled to see something completely different.

The lessons seen in sacred stories are demonstrated varied. How teachers use the sacred stories in the classrooms may vary greatly as well. Those stories of Chakabesh help to explore the Seven Grandfather Teachings, while also teaching about codes of conduct and behaviour, and about the culture in general. For teachers, using sacred stories as part of Seven Grandfather Teachings Education need not be daunting or intimidating. The teachings within our sacred stories, and in particular those sacred storied that are available in print and presented by respected Elders and easily available to educators,

may allow such a program (should it ever exist) to be successful within educational classrooms.

In regards to my dissertation, the teachings of sacred stories as well as the teachings in the Seven Grandfathers are topics which inform my story method and that help me to more successfully use Indigenous storytelling as my methodology. Within an Indigenous storytelling methodology, as Kovach (2009) explains, "in presenting research, a complexity of Indigenous story-based research is transferring what is intended to be oral to written text" (p. 100). Also, while I do write the truth as *I* see it, I write that truth from my own perspective, and with the understanding that others may not share the same perspective, nor agree with it. But I do not see that as a flaw. I see that as an inherent part of story writing. Stories are a myriad of truths: one person's truth turned into one protagonist's truth that is based on an exaggeration of or a comparative empathy to another truth which is also based on a particular moment or emotion. Thomas King, in his published lecture *The Truth about Stories* (2003), writes that, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 2). Truths that are also based on "complex historical, social, and political process embedded in the continuance of our collective presence, knowledge, and peoplehood" (Sinclair, 2010, p. 23). Truths are varied, and truths are layered. When writing story and using story as Indigenous methodology, those author-turned-protagonist truths and those exaggerations of truth are not necessarily distortions of truth either, since, in Cree and Ojibwe oral traditions, storytellers often add flourish or improvisation in areas between main sequential events (Ellis, 1995).

These half-truths that complete the other half-fictions that I spoke of earlier in this dissertation are half-truths of mine as they are presented in the dissertation story. The

half-truths are pieces of myself and, as King cautions, I have to be careful of the stories that I tell (King, 2003, p. 10). I open myself up to criticism, as I mentioned earlier, and to judgement of others. But there's braveness in doing so. There's braveness in opening yourself up and writing honestly about the truths that are shared. Citing Genesis and the story of the witches from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1986), King (2003) asks if it is our nature to tell stories that reflect the world as it truly is, or if we simply start off with the wrong stories (p. 26). We know that, traditionally, there is a right time to tell stories, and typically this is done during the winter months. Perhaps this might be the only problem; the problem may not be with the story itself, but only with the timing of when it was told. There is a right time for people to hear stories, a right time for them to pick up the teachings and lessons built into a story, a right time for them to grow from what they learn, a right time to share and try to understand each other's truths.

Seeing into these truths that make up a story also means that I must see within myself and who I am as a storyteller. Leanne Simpson (2011) in her work *Dancing on Turtle's Back* speaks to the writing process of Indigenous peoples and looking in to the self to write. Simpson says that we should focus our work

into a flourishing of the *Indigenous* inside. . . To do so, we need to engage in *Indigenous* processes, since according to our traditions, the processes of engagement highly influence the outcome of the engagement itself. . . In essence, we need to not just figure out who we are; we need to re-establish the processes by which we live who we are within the current context we find ourselves. (p. 17)

Finding that context in which to situate myself has always been a focus during this journey. When I began my Master's, it was begun knowing that I had a dream to complete a PhD on some topic around Indigenous story, on Ojibwe story. When I wrote my Master's it was to prepare me for my future task. I had a desire to gain a better understanding of my culture, of my cultural traditions, and of my cultural belief system—those, I strongly feel, are the backbone of understanding Indigenous story and, more specifically, Ojibwe sacred story. This preparedness is also reflected in Niigonwedom James Sinclair's (2010) article where he writes that "The task of interpreting, retelling, and theorizing aadizookaanag [sacred stories] requires a cultural fluency that, according to some, [like Basil Johnston] takes a lifetime to learn" (Sinclair, 2010, p. 24). Although my lifetime so far is young in comparison to those who can truly say they have a definitive "cultural fluency", a quarter of my life so far has been researching it and all of my life has been living it. In this vein of coming to understand one's self as a greater part of the world, or even as a greater part of one's own life, Butterfly echoes this teaching.

While trying to sort out the different truths in her life, Butterfly often seeks her Cocom's support and guidance. Cocom is a support to Butterfly during the times when Butterfly questions what she sees. Cocom takes things as they are; she accepts the things in the world which can be unexplainable. When Butterfly tells her of her dreams or asks her Cocom if she too sees the "little people," Cocom tells her simply that she does and to not be afraid. In Ruby Slipperjack's *Little Voice* (2001), Ray, a young girl, spends the summer with her Cocom, learning about traditional activities and daily living. She too often seeks her Cocom's advice on a variety of things happening in her life, even though Cocom does not say very much. This same type of understanding between Butterfly and

her Cocom is also reflected in the relationship between Ray and her Grandma in *Little Voice*:

I glanced at her as she pushed the door open. 'Why would I want to go walking through the bush, Grandma?' She smiled at me and did not reply, like it was her own little secret. All right, I could be patient. I said nothing as I watched her pull her clothes box from under the bed. I also pulled out my suitcase and my box of camping clothes I had stored under the little bunk bed where I slept. (p. 148)

Although the relationships between Butterfly and the people in her life suffer because of Butterfly's depression and the distance she places between them, the relationships do mean quite a lot to Butterfly and are the reasons why she is able to overcome her depression. Additionally, although Butterfly cuts her fingers, it is not with the intention of committing suicide. In *Darkness Calls* by Steve Sanderson (2006), he has a protagonist named Kyle who, partly because of bullying and his weight, has thoughts about suicide. Throughout the graphic novel, we follow Kyle as he pairs up with Weesquachak, portrayed in a superhero outfit. It is Kyle who is able to defeat Windigo and, symbolically, defeat his thoughts of suicide. However, for Butterfly, suicide is not an action that she considers during her depression and anger throughout the story. Rather, cutting is a way for Butterfly to release and express her depression on the outside and as a form of escapism from those darker emotions. Due to their emotional states, both Kyle in *Darkness Falls* and Butterfly become a target of the Windigo, and face that battle. To compare further, Sanderson's story shows Weesquachak being nearly defeated by the Windigo and he tells Kyle that he is the one who can defeat him. Kyle saves himself from

essentially dying and becoming a Windigo himself; Butterfly also does this herself.

Butterfly looks to herself to defeat the Windigo and, essentially, she looks to herself to defeat her depression and guilt over the death of her cousin.

Butterfly's relationship with Weesquachak is also similar to protagonist Janine in Ruby Slipperjack's *Weesquachak* (2005). In *Weesquachak*, Janine develops a relationship with a man, but Weesquachak has become interested in Janine and begins to follow her and interfere in subtle ways in her life. In both Ruby Slipperjack's novel and my own dissertation novel, Weesquachak can be seen both on the outskirts of the main action in the story just out of sight and in close contact with the protagonist. Like Janine, Butterfly also becomes drawn into conversation with Weesquachak, partly because of curiosity and partly because we get the impression that he is easy to open up to. Slipperjack (2005), reflects this same relationship in the following passage:

My heart thudded against my chest as I looked at the door. Who could that be? No one knew where I lived. I walked to the door and looked out the window. There was a Native man standing there with his head down. Thoroughly puzzled, I opened the door and asked what he wanted... I knew who he was. I remember people talking about him in the community. He just showed up one day. He comes and goes. He never actually says who he is or where he is from. Helps people out, stays awhile then he's gone again. Heaven knows how long before he shows up again. From what I hear, he's quite reclusive and doesn't answer personal questions. Somehow, it just doesn't seem to matter once you start talking to him. (p. 81)

Through Weesquachak, we see the development of life, death, and those daily bits in between. We see that he is also multi-layered and complex like humans. We also get the sense that his intentions are not always what they seem, because Weesquachak is at times a fickle being, run by his emotions and not necessarily by his logic—because that is Weesquachak's way.

I will interject here and state that while I was writing my dissertation, I also had to be very keenly aware of being respectful to my culture. In this instance, I must also keep in mind these questions as well: Am I being respectful to the people of my culture in all areas of this dissertation? Do I honour my family and ancestors by writing this? When I wrote of the sacred story characters, I did my best to portray them in an honest and accurate way from the information I gathered from the texts. I also tried to ensure that I was demonstrating proper respect to Butterfly's parents, grandparents, other Elders, to her friends, and, eventually, to herself.

In a few parts of the dissertation novel, I use poetic-like text, poetry form, and free-form poetry to help express a character's emotions. Discussing ways to explore worlds through poetry and through trickster, Judith Leggatt (2010) writes that

The spirit and function of the trickster characters in the poems [from Lenore Keeshig-Tobias' 'Trickster Beyond 1992: Our relationship,' 1992; and Annharte Baker's 'Coyote Columbus Café, 1994] influence the texts themselves, breaking down boundaries and forcing readers to see their worlds from a new angle . . . in which First Nations writers play with form, style, and language in a manner that . . . has its roots in traditional [Indigenous] forms. (p. 236)

Although the poems within my dissertation novel are not specifically about Weesquachak or trickster, they express emotions and ideas about things that are feeling trickster-like (depressive thoughts), or things that have been followed through or are on that journey (Tristan's expression of love for Butterfly), and things that are yet to be determined (Butterfly's end poem). The themes of those poems I feel are themes reflected in Indigenous sacred story that feature heroes like Chakabesh or even Weesquachak himself (as described by Ellis): the journey, the understanding of something (what that is always depends upon the reader), and the knowing that there is more yet to come. The Tanka song that Tristan writes for Butterfly (which is described in detail above) provides an easy segue into a love song. Although a Japanese poetry form is used in an Indigenous story format, the intention is to demonstrate a respect for all people and all cultures—something that reflects the Seven Grandfather Teaching of respect. Another implication of the Japanese Tanka, is that I am not an expert on the Tanka style. However, neither is Tristan, the character who writes the poem. If there are any inaccuracies or errors in the writing of the Tanka poem, they reflect the novice in both Tristan and myself. I am aware of much research in the field of poetry, however discussing poetry and its forms and how it is included within my dissertation are beyond the scope of this work and may be better suited to the writing of a future journal article on the subject.

We also see poetry appear in the story from Butterfly. Butterfly writes a longer poem near the end of the dissertation story (pp. 173-174). This last poem is a free form poem. I chose the free form poem structure as a metaphor for Butterfly's freer spirit and as a metaphor for the butterfly. In the Ojibwe language, butterfly is *memengwaa*, and *memengwaa* literally translates as the spirit of little children. Basil Johnston (1994) writes

of butterflies as, "maemaegawaesuk, of soft and many colours, fluttering and dancing in the wind. They made the eyes of children twinkle. They became the spirit of children's play. On death, the butterflies changed again into beings who inhabited glades and glens seeking children to play with" (p. 168). In the dissertation story, Memengwaa is also Butterfly's animal spirit and a part of her spirit name Ozhaawashkwaa-Memengwaa (Blue Butterfly). An animal spirit is typically an animal that appears and lingers around the time of a baby's birth. This animal is significant to the life of the baby, especially when they are adolescents and begin a vision quest journey. The importance and purpose of the spirit name ceremony is described by Angel (2002): "a Mide [medicine person] [E]lder had been chosen to name the child from a vision he or she had received" (p. 138). The importance of the butterfly is clear at the end of the dissertation story as well; it echoes Butterfly's lighter and happier spirit.

Classrooms and Teaching

I have discussed the importance of teaching Seven Grandfather Teachings and the implementation of sacred story within educational classroom settings. I will also add some additional thoughts on classrooms and teachers. Since those Seven Grandfather Teachings share the same virtues appearing in many books on virtues in the classrooms, it is possible to carry out such curriculum lessons and instruction while also bringing in components of the Anishinawbe and Aboriginal culture. Lastly, no matter the age of the student, there is always opportunity for sacred stories to be read by students and/or read-aloud. Not only does this also assist in teaching those virtues of the Seven Grandfather Teachings but reading aloud also assists in developing good listening habits and auditory skills, skills that will be beneficial throughout a student's education: to further engage

their older students in independent reading or reading groups, or for teachers wishing to engage their students in developing good listening habits. During a day of supply teaching, I was fortunate to be able to see such an example when I headed off to the elementary school across the street with my intermediate supply class and saw how engaged and excited the younger students were in picking out their books and how the older students became engaged in telling these stories to their reading buddies. The reading and hearing of sacred stories on a regular basis in cases such as these, no doubt, would have positive impact both for the cultural component and the potential knowledge gained by both the older and younger student.

Reading stories and sacred stories helps readers to understand their lives by relating to situations within those stories they read—I do think that my dissertation novel can be used to introduce teachers and students to sacred stories, Seven Grandfather Teachings, into the context of the school. Telling sacred stories aloud teaches about our culture and we see meaning within our lives about our history, our ceremonies and our traditions.

With more and more students, in Northwestern Ontario and other areas of Canada, self-identifying as Aboriginal, there is a great need for cultural content within the curriculum at all school levels to be included in a variety of ways (LaRocque, 2002). One effective way to do this is through the use of sacred stories as part of a story-based Character Education promoting the Seven Grandfather Teachings; here not only are components of the Aboriginal culture being used in meaningful ways, but the benefits of the virtues which can be passed down and instilled in students is also a part of the benefits of Seven Grandfather Teachings Education. We can see the advantages of using heroic characters to demonstrate the virtues in the Seven Grandfather Teachings that

many cultures and societies share but also to help engage reluctant readers through the exciting stories of interesting, humorous, and complex characters. The potential benefits through the use of sacred story-based Seven Grandfather Teachings Education are vast, for all cultures and all students. My point here is that sacred stories inherently hold much more meaning and a great deal of potential for applications in the education system and in life: within curriculum and in the class, the acknowledgement of the need for feelings and emotions, of the need for creativity and imagination, and, of the need for a greater and more deeply meaningful inclusion of the Anishinawbe culture within mainstream education. Ultimately, what is at stake here is not simply the loss of our sacred stories, but the loss of our culture that is inherently embedded within those stories. If we lose those stories, do we lose our culture as well?

The translation of sacred story characters, and the ethics and rules of behaviour into English is a step in ensuring the survival of community and family sacred story. That I incorporate them into a young adult novel form also helps to make them accessible to youth. We see many Indigenous writers writing about culture (Absolon & Willett, 2004). We also see many Indigenous scholars writing about different forms of creative writing and how autobiography is closely related to oral storytelling. Craig Womack (1999), a Creek-Cherokee scholar, writes that poetry is autobiographical because it has a "natural evolution from the oral tradition where a performed story is very close to the person who tells it" (p. 209). Although my work is not purely autobiographical, I have attempted through the form, structure, and style of my story to echo oral traditions.

The importance of sharing Indigenous works with all students, regardless of background, are ideas shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. Non-

Indigenous scholar Laura Beard (2010) writes of the importance of sharing Indigenous texts with non-Indigenous students: "Teaching these texts allows us to realize and to help our students realize that there are times we may not understand everything in a text because we are not of that culture. Teaching Native texts encourages us to open a classroom discussion about issues of cultural embeddedness in experience and circumstance" (p. 124). She also discusses a classroom activity in which students explore identity and find connections to the stories they read:

A class activity at the beginning of the course in which students are asked to come up with terms they use to define elements of their personal identities and their communities can provide material to compare and contrast with lists they might make for individuals and communities from the Native texts they read during the course.

Such a class activity may help students see how, while individual identity is recognized and honored, the sense of family and tribal identity that takes precedence in many of the texts we teach may differ from traditions in the dominant Euro-American culture as well as vary among tribal traditions. (p. 112)

I see the value in putting yourselves in another person's shoes so as to broaden mutual understandings and to share human experiences about life. My translation of sacred story characters, of the ethics and rules of behaviour into an English text written for a young adult audience which takes place in a contemporary and urban setting is but one of many ways to continue the oral tradition and the knowledge of the sacred stories.

Concluding Remarks

The process of the dissertation so far has been adventurous, personally interesting, and a metamorphosis. I worked through many revisions of the dissertation story, and drafts of the literature review have gone through many thematic stages. The dissertation as a whole has evolved to become a work that not only reflects the themes and topics, but also reflects the cultural purpose of storytelling, story and Indigenous research. I have written from an Indigenous research perspective in this dissertation: I use an Indigenous story as method, and Indigenous storytelling as methodology. I also use an Indigenous perspective, that of a young Anishinawbe girl who interacts with Indigenous sacred story characters and participates in Indigenous ceremony. However, her knowledge of Ojibwe is not strong, just as mine is not. But there is always an interest in learning the language, for Butterfly and myself. Anishinawbe oral traditions are strong and prevalent in today's world, and are testaments to the fact that these sacred stories are integral to Anishinawbe knowledge, Anishinawbe education, and to whole and balanced persons.

The idea of metamorphosis, an additional theme indicated in the title of my dissertation, echoes my own metamorphosis throughout life, and throughout my education and PhD Journey, my life as a teacher, and, more personally, my life as a wife and step-mother. During this journey I have learned many things. I have learned how important my culture and its traditions, and my identity are intertwined. I have learned the significant role the seven grandfather teachings and ethics and rules of behaviour have in my own daily life. I aspire to follow all of these in my life but recognize this is a lifelong undertaking. Most of all, I have learned of my own strength as an Ojibwe woman; I have also learned how this strength is reflected in my role as an Indigenous researcher. Over the course of time in this journey, I know I have transformed in many

ways, and it is this change that inspired my theme of metamorphosis.

Overholt and Callicott (1982) write of metamorphosis as it appears in story, "The circumstances under which such transformations are said to take place are similarly varied . . . sometimes . . . the metamorphosis occurs as part of an actor's escape from a dangerous situation (p. 142). Throughout the dissertation story, we see Butterfly change, transform, and morph as she learns from and grows as a result of her experiences both in the waking world and in her dreams. We see how dreams play an important part in Butterfly's life. We can surmise that "dreams provide an important means of coming into direct contact with other-than-human persons" (Overholt & Callicott, 1982, p. 149). Butterfly does this especially with her dreams of Weesquachak and how a relationship between them grows. We see this growth when Weesquachak begins to speak to Butterfly, compared to earlier dreams where he hides or does not speak. We also see how Butterfly's dreams help her overcome many things in her life and help her to not only understand herself better, but the world around her as well. Dreams, as Overholt and Callicott (1982) write, "are an important means by which an individual gains power" (p. 148). Butterfly gains power through the defeat of Windigo, and she gains the power to love herself through her experiences in dreams.

Story has power. It has the power to inspire, to cause changes in thinking, to change behaviours through teaching, to cause people to talk about it and share their thoughts, and to connect with readers so that they cry, laugh, become angry, feel fear, and even experience love as they read about the characters in the story. Elders tell us that we have a responsibility to share a story once we have learnt it and are comfortable to share that knowledge. On this idea of sharing story, Thomas King (2003) explains: "it's yours.

Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (p. 29).

I leave it up to you then. Whatever you take from my dissertation story and my discussions here, I leave it up to you.

Miigwech

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Appendix A

Glossary

Aadizokaang or aatihsoohkaan or tipatihsoohkaan sacred stories *Ojibwe*

Aanii-na an expression of surprise *Ojibwe*

Aanji-bimaadizi s/he changes his/her own life *Ojibwe*

Aandi ezhaayan where are you going? *Ojibwe*

Achimoowin to tell a story or to tell the truth *Cree*

Achithoogewin to mythologize *Cree*

Ahpanemo hopeful *Ojibwe* (can also be referred to as ombendam)

Asemaa tobacco *Ojibwe*

Ashi-ga-ga-gih evil raven or bird of death in superstition *Cree*

Amadaji s/he wakes from being cold *Ojibwe*

Anishinabemowin is the Ojibwe language

Anishinawbe the Ojibwe (in my family and some Western Ojibwe dialects) identify as this in their language

Apa'chininiichug a word to describe a type of tiny and mischievous being who lives in forests, near rocks and shores *Ojibwe*

Apowawin in dreaming one is aware of him/her self. This is known as awakening or self-revelation *Ojibwe*

Ashi-ga-ga-gih evil raven (bird of death) *Cree*

Âtalôhkâna sacred stories *Cree*

Baashkaawe'o moos' caterpillar hatches (from larvae) *Ojibwe*

Bagijigan an offering *Ojibwe*

Bagijige the act of making an offering *Ojibwe*

Banaadendam s/he despairs *Ojibwe*

Bawaajige dreams *Ojibwe*

Binay-sih Thunderbird *Ojibwe*

Booshoo/Boozhoo hello *Ojibwe* (*spellings vary in dialects*)

Dibaajimowinan or tipaacimowin or aacimowin narratives ranging from personal experiences, childhood memories, reminiscences, hunting experiences, histories *Ojibwe* (similar to (Tip)âcimôwina)

Dush and *Ojibwe*

Gashkiwegii'idizo moos' the caterpillar wraps himself in a cocoon *Ojibwe*

Geezis sun *Ojibwe*

Genay-big serpent *Cree*

Giga-waabamin Menenawaa I'll see you again *Ojibwe* (there is no word for "Goodbye" in the Ojibwe language). This phrase is used as a way to say goodbye to a person knowing that they will see each other again at a later time. This idea can be applied to either in this physical existence, or in a spiritual existence after death.

Giichigotaa pulling out of the cocoon *Ojibwe*

Giimooj secret (as in a secret crush or lover) *Ojibwe*

Giwashkweyendam confusion *Ojibwe*

Ininiw the Cree (Moose Cree, Western Swampy Cree) identify as this in their language. Traditionally called themselves and were known as the Muskego.

Kithaskiwin to tell a lie or to weave a web of fiction *Cree*

Kokum Dibaajimowinan Grandmother Teachings *Ojibwe*

Maajiigi moos'/Bimigi moos' caterpillar growth *Ojibwe*

Ma-heegun wolf *Cree*

Ma'iingan wolf *Ojibwe*

Manadis a Kwense bad girl (literally bad that girl) *Ojibwe*

Memengwaa butterfly *Ojibwe*

Memengwaa-bimiigiwin butterfly growth *Ojibwe*

Memengwaawid to be a butterfly *Ojibwe*

Nagamowin songs *Ojibwe*

Nesta and *Cree*

Nibo s/he dies or s/he is dead *Ojibwe*

Nindizhinikaaz I am *Ojibwe*. This is used to introduce oneself (i.e. Amy Farrell-Morneau nindizhinikaaz).

Omakaki frog *Ojibwe*

Owaawano memengwaa butterfly lays eggs *Ojibwe*

Ozhaawashkwaa-Memengwaa blue butterfly *Ojibwe*

Pâstâmowin stories about blasphemy and requital *Cree*

Pinassi Thunderbird *Ojibwe*

Shingibish grebe or helldiver *Ojibwe*

Tikinagan baby carrier *Ojibwe*

(Tip)âcimôwina narratives ranging from personal experiences, childhood memories, reminiscences, hunting experiences, histories *Cree* (similar to Dibaajimowinan)

Wahsayabe clear sighted *Ojibwe*

Weenga Zagiz I am very afraid *Ojibwe*